



Interim Head of School

PS1 Pluralistic School
Santa Monica, California



Introduction

For a position that will start in July 2022, PS1 Pluralistic School seeks an Interim Head of School to support the institution in its transition to a new long-term leader, following the retirement of Founding Head of School Joel Pelcyger. This is an outstanding opportunity for a wise, confident, empathetic leader eager to guide a progressive elementary school as it intends to build on Mr. Pelcyger's legacy and continue evolving to serve many future generations.

Founded in 1971, PS1 Pluralistic School is a forward-thinking independent school in Santa Monica, CA, enrolling 217 students in grades K-6. The school's mission and philosophy are defined by pluralism – the idea that empathy, innovation, and collaboration are essential to building a better world for all. Truly student-centered, PS1 helps children understand themselves as individuals and as members of many overlapping, expanding community groups.

PS1 is a well-established school with an exceptional faculty, a high-functioning administrative team, strong financials, an engaged parent body, and many cherished traditions that help the community retain its tightly knit character.

Please visit the school's website for more information about its philosophy, history, programs, campus, and people: <https://www.psone.org/>.

Overview

MISSION – *PS1 is a diverse community committed to an ever-evolving model of pluralistic elementary education. On a path to self-knowledge, students engage and become the best versions of themselves. They develop critical academic and interpersonal skills to be confident and passionate contributors to an increasingly connected world.*

VISION – *Celebrate the Many; Build One*

PHILOSOPHY – *At PS1, we recognize that every child is unique, so we built a school that nurtures individual talents and learning styles. That's how children become the best versions of themselves, in a school where fitting in is about being yourself.*

CORE VALUES

Competence: *What we know and learn*

Confidence: *How we feel about what we know and what we bring to any situation*

Connection: *What we do with what we know*

DIVERSITY STATEMENT – *As a community committed to inclusivity, PS1 emphasizes an interdisciplinary and holistic approach to fostering the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to be a global citizen working towards a more equitable world. PS1 embraces inclusivity in all aspects of our institution including curriculum, professional development, admissions, recruitment of faculty and staff, community outreach, board and administrative decisions, and student and family life. Inclusion of all groups provides a fuller, richer learning community for all.*

ENROLLMENT – 217 students, 169 families; nine multi-age classroom “Clusters,” grades K-6 (2020-21).

CLASSROOM TEACHING – In 2020-21, PS1 had 18 lead teachers and five specialists in art, music, P.E., library, and STEM studio; the school had a 10-to-1 student-teacher ratio with an average of 26 students per class.

FUNDRAISING – PS1 raises approximately \$1 million per year and regularly achieves 100% family and board response to its annual fund appeal.

FINANCES – PS1 has a \$9.3 million operating budget (2020-21). The school boasts a comfortable endowment and no debt. The school also owns (outright) nine pieces of property that are contiguous with or very near the current campus.

TUITION & FINANCIAL AID – Annual tuition is \$35,490 (2021-22). In 2020-21, PS1 allocated \$1.4 million in financial assistance – more than 19% of tuition revenue – to 26% of the student body.

DIVERSITY – 51% faculty and staff and 48% of students identify as BIPOC. Students come from 38 ZIP codes and 85 different feeder schools (as of August 1, 2020).

ACCREDITATION & MEMBERSHIPS – California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS); National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS)



Culture & Philosophy

PS1's curriculum, campus, and schedule have been designed to support young learners as they build meaningful relationships and explore their place in the world. The mutual respect between students and adults on the PS1 campus is a palpable, distinctive feature of the school. Teachers, administrators, parents, and staff are united in their efforts to embrace the freedom, energy, curiosity, and complexities of childhood, meeting each student where they are and encouraging them in their discovery of self and others.

Guided by the idea that students “fit in by being themselves,” children at PS1 are celebrated every day for exactly who they are, and they are well supported on their journey to discover and become the best possible version of themselves. A common refrain among alumni parents is that PS1 helped their child be truly confident in who they are, comfortable in their own skin and unafraid to express themselves honestly in any context.

Simultaneously, PS1 is very intentional about building community. The school encourages students to appreciate differences and connect through their shared humanity. Such a relational approach to learning with an emphasis on balancing the needs of the individual with the needs of the community gives the campus a unique energy. The education of young people at PS1 is inspiring, but far from formulaic. It is, as one trustee put it, “magical but messy.” And it is the kind of project that requires a vigilant, energetic leader who can inspire faculty and families to invest in the school's mission, respect the inefficiencies, and trust that the community will always do what's best for the students.

Campus & Setting

The joy of discovery and learning that draws so many families to PS1 is only enhanced by its sustainable, award-winning campus in the heart of Santa Monica. Located about a mile from the beach and Santa Monica's famous pier, the school's neighborhood is an astoundingly diverse mix of residential and commercial spaces. Single-family homes occupy palm-lined streets with small businesses, low-rise apartment buildings, restaurants, and film production studios.



The PS1 campus covers 1.2 acres and has 30,500 square feet of indoor space over several adjacent lots with four main buildings and a STEAM studio/makerspace – a retrofit of the school's original home – just across the street from

the central campus. The bright, modern buildings were purpose-built for PS1, and the spacious, light-filled classrooms are bursting with evidence of student life and learning. The campus also includes a rooftop garden, community room, art space, administrative offices, project room/kitchen, music room, library, and even a classic school bell.

The innovative outdoor spaces at PS1 are outstanding, especially when compared to other elementary schools in Los Angeles. Each classroom has one or more adjoining outdoor spaces, and students have access to two expansive, park-like play yards that include sports fields/courts, performance spaces, natural elements (e.g., a bamboo forest and a landmark oak tree), and playscapes. The richness and design of these areas supports all types of play: artistic or athletic, solitary or collective, relaxed or rambunctious.

To learn more about the PS1 campus and facilities, visit the school's interactive map [here](#).





Academic Program

The academic program at PS1 is designed to provide balanced support to students in their intellectual, social, artistic, and physical development over the course of seven years. At every age and stage of learning, the child's natural development is respected. Learning is organized around problem solving, projects, and questions, and the teaching is typically interdisciplinary – in a context and for a purpose.

The PS1 faculty members are defined by their creativity, independence, flexibility, and empathy. They are highly respected by families and beloved by students for their hard work in bringing focus and structure to the school's individualized approach to teaching and learning. Students connect effortlessly with teachers and confidently seek them out for celebration, support, and everything in between. The faculty-led curriculum is intentional, emphasizing collaborative problem-solving, learning goals, and integrated social-emotional lessons.

The multi-age classrooms known as Clusters are a special feature of PS1's academic program and reflect the pluralistic values of the place. The school has four Clusters: three Youngers classes (K-1), two Bridge classes (grades 1-2 or 2-3), two Middles classes (grades 3-4), and two Olders classes (grades 5-6). There is a two-year age range in each multi-age classroom. Children are grouped developmentally, and every child will experience being a younger student and an older student at various times during their journey through PS1.

Multi-age classrooms help students learn to thrive in many different kinds of environments, and when combined with the school's emphasis on community events, allows every student to know every teacher and nearly all of the other students at PS1. Clusters present many operational and logistical challenges for the school, but everyone agrees that the system helps the school consistently develop students who are confident, engaged, resilient, well-rounded, and kind.



PS1 graduates are in high demand across Los Angeles, and families are well supported in their search for a middle school program that is the best fit for their child(ren). The most popular destinations for PS1 alumni over the past decade include: Brentwood School, Crossroads School, Harvard-Westlake School, Wildwood School, and Windward School. Graduates also continue at a public or charter schools, most often enrolling at Paul Revere Charter Middle School & Magnet Center, Lincoln Middle School, and John Adams Middle School.

More details regarding the curriculum at PS1 can be found [here](#).

Administration & Governance

The Senior Administrative Team (SAT), led by the Head of School, comprises the Associate Head of School, Assistant Head for Teaching and Learning, the Director of Advancement, the Director of Admissions and Alumni Relations, the Director of Finance and Operations, and the Director of Communications & Marketing. Six additional administrators assist in the areas of development, business operations, admissions, program administration, executive support, and technology. A mix of newcomers and veterans



with many years of experience at PS1 and other independent schools, the SAT is a talented, collaborative, easygoing group that will prove invaluable to the Interim Head and the school community throughout this leadership transition.

PS1's Board of Directors, which includes alumni, current parents, and past parents, is a loyal and active governing body. The board's

stewardship of the school's mission and its support of Mr. Pelcyger's vision have been strong and steady for many years, and board members are eager to offer their time and talents to ensure the school's long-term success. In recent years, the board has invested in its own development, improving the way it uses data to inform decisions, rethinking its committee structure, and carefully mapping out this leadership transition. The board has also led several research projects to lay the groundwork for a strategic vision to be developed with the help of the next long-term Head of School.

Opportunities for the Interim Head of School

The Interim Head of School will oversee the day-to-day operations of PS1 and ensure that the transitional year is both positive and productive for PS1. The school enjoys an enviable balance sheet, is confident in its mission, and has a community united behind its distinctive brand of child-centered learning.

During the 2021-22 school year, PS1 will focus on celebrating Mr. Pelcyger's service to the institution and rebounding from the stress of the pandemic. It is likely, however, that select effects of the past year may echo for some time, and the work of reweaving the community and building a more resilient organization will continue under the Interim Head.

Leveraging the energy, expertise, and perspective of the appointee, the board hopes to define a few areas of focus for a yearlong agenda that will help PS1 build on its many strengths and prepare the way for the long-term leader. The community is emphatic in its desire to find a leader who will nurture Mr. Pelcyger's legacy and respect PS1's values,



culture, and philosophy. The school's priorities for the interim year will be determined in collaboration with the appointee and are likely to include (in alphabetical order):

DEIJ –PS1 is rightfully proud of its progressive identity and past leadership on issues of diversity, equity, inclusion and justice (DEIJ). The board has adopted a strategic goal to assess the school's climate of DEIJ and incorporate DEIJ best practices into all aspects of the school. The principles of pluralism offer the community a natural framework for more advanced conversations about DEIJ, and the Interim Head of School will support PS1 as it strives to fulfill this goal.



ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT– PS1 has always been a selective school that has received applications from more talented students than it can admit, but in recent years, increased competition and shifting demographics have required the school to redouble its recruitment and retention efforts. Partnering with the Director of Admissions, the Interim Head will need to enroll a strong, diverse class of kindergarteners for the 2023–24 school year. Maintaining the PS1's network of relationships with schools across L.A. that welcome its alumni will give current and future families additional confidence in the strength of the school's ever-evolving program. More broadly, embracing the PS1 brand and projecting an optimistic vision for the school – with the help of the Directors of Advancement and Communications – will help prime the community for success in its marketing, enrollment, and fundraising efforts.

GOVERNANCE – The PS1 Board of Directors is deeply committed to the school, and its members have partnered well with Mr. Pelcyger to help support and sustain his vision for PS1. In this leadership transition, the board sees an opportunity to reflect on its work and ensure that it is operating at the highest possible level. The board would welcome the counsel of an experienced Interim Head who can finetune their understanding of NAIS best practices and guide them toward their full potential as an impactful, supportive, strategic body. In particular, the board is interested in the wise use of metrics and benchmarking to inform its strategic deliberations and decisions. The Interim Head



will also work with the board to coordinate a smooth transition to the long-term appointee.

INFRASTRUCTURE – PS1 is blessed with a beautiful campus and a purpose-built main building that is less than a decade old. The urban campus includes several buildings and spaces, however, that could be easily upgraded or refreshed. Additionally, PS1 has unused space on two nearby lots that were recently purchased, and the board is eager to lay the groundwork for its future development. PS1 is also open to expert recommendations on how the school relates to industry standards and innovations regarding core operations and logistics – everything from software and administrative support to HR policy and scheduling. With its distinctive culture, intimate scale, and focus on faculty, the ability to recruit, develop, and retain strong teachers and administrators is a perennial priority for PS1. While they will not be expected to make dramatic changes, the Interim Head will have an opportunity to provide feedback on the overall effectiveness and efficiency of PS1.



Who Should Apply

To serve as the Interim Head of School for the 2022–23 school year, PS1 seeks a seasoned leader who is confident in their ability to lead an elementary program in the wake of a Founding Head with a 51-year tenure. Mr. Pelcyger’s vision and energy have shaped the school from day one, and it will take a leader with a big heart and a steady hand to shepherd the community through its transition to a new Head of School.

Candidates with a sophisticated understanding of the role of an Interim Head are especially encouraged to apply, though the search committee is eager to see applications from any leader with the skills and motivation to help PS1 address its most pressing needs.

The school desires an authentic, collaborative, motivated educator who is well aligned with the core mission, vision, and values of PS1 – a leader who is passionate about developing the unique gifts of every child and helping them realize their potential as a valued citizen of the world.

“Everyone contributes,” as they say at PS1, and decision-making at the school is intentionally inclusive and deliberative. The appointee will need to have superior political instincts, outstanding communication skills, and a truly collaborative leadership style. Ensuring a strong cultural and professional fit will be critical for the Interim Head as they will have but a few months to earn the trust and respect of the board and the senior administrative team.



The ideal candidate will have/be most or all of the following:

- A record of success as an independent school administrator, preferably with experience as an Interim Head of School.
- A sincere love of working with and for elementary-aged children; eager to understand each student holistically.
- A warm, approachable personality.
- Superior communication skills; able to speak, listen, read, and write with real authenticity and focus.
- An expert perspective on best practices in independent school operations and management.
- A great mentor with an enthusiasm for empowering and developing colleagues.
- A demonstrated interest in board development and governance issues.
- A strategic thinker with a good head for business and finance.
- A genuine enthusiasm for advancement work, including fundraising, enrollment management, communications, and exmissions.
- Empathetic and fully present; able to connect easily with constituents from all walks of life.
- A confident leader in the DEIJ space; able to balance boldness and clarity with care and compassion.

- Able to have difficult conversations and make unpopular decisions when they serve the best interests of the school.
- Flexible, forgiving, steady, and kind.
- A strong work ethic and a positive, resilient mindset.

Search Overview

Butler/White Strategies is partnering with PS1 and its Board of Directors to lead the recruitment and selection process for this opportunity. Jo Butler and Zachary White are serving as the lead consultants.

To nominate a colleague, prospective candidates should email admin@butlerwhite.com. To express a personal interest in this opportunity, prospective candidates should include a current resume with their message. All inquiries and nominations are confidential. Introductory materials sent to Butler/White will not be shared with PS1 without the candidate's consent.

To formalize their application and ensure full consideration, candidates should also submit via email a letter of interest and a list of five professional references. (No references will be contacted without the permission of the applicant.) Applicants are also welcome to submit



a statement of educational philosophy and/or other materials that might help the committee better understand relevant aspects of their candidacy and potential fit with PS1.

Candidates should submit their materials **as soon as possible and no later than 5:00 p.m. EDT on Thursday, September 9**. The review of applications will begin immediately, and

interviews may begin as soon as August. An appointment is expected by mid-autumn. This calendar is subject to change based on the dynamics of the search and the best interests of PS1. Butler/White will update all applicants of their status as the search unfolds.



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