

Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School

SCHOOL LEADER SEARCH REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS



Date posted:
RFP Due Date:

September 15, 2021
October 1, 2021

School Address
49 Antietam St.
Devens, MA 01434
www.theparkerschool.org

Contact Person
Christine Regan-Davi, Board Chair

Email: boardchair@theparkerschool.org

I. INTRODUCTION

A. General Information

Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School (Parker) invites proposals from qualified consulting firms to provide Executive Search Consultant Services for the position of Principal and Head of School. The Board of Trustees of the School intends to engage the selected firm for the period of time necessary to conduct and conclude the Principal/Head of School search process by March 2022. The successful proposer will be expected to develop and implement a search plan in accordance with the proposal requirements described herein, including:

- a. Supporting the Board and the Search Committee in developing the criteria and qualifications for selecting a Principal/Head of School;
- b. Facilitating the process for community input and engagement;
- c. Generating interest from a diverse group of potential candidates through comprehensive state, regional, and national outreach;
- d. Coordinating the interview process;
- e. Assisting the Board and Search Committee in narrowing down the list of finalists;
- f. Handling the logistics of the search and interview process;
- g. Assisting the Board in developing an appropriate compensation package for the Principal/ Head of School;
- h. Assisting the Board and Search Committee with stakeholder communications regarding the hiring process;
- i. Other search-related assistance the Board and/or Search Committee may require.

Proposals must be received no later than noon (Eastern) on October 1, 2021, and may be emailed, mailed, or filed in person at the address listed below. All inquiries regarding this Request for Proposals should be directed to Christine Regan-Davi, Board Chair, at boardchair@theparkerschool.org; all inquiries must be in writing.

Hard copy:

Francis W. Parker Charter Essential School
Attn: Board Chair
49 Antietam St.
Devens, MA 01434

B. Background Information

MISSION STATEMENT

The Parker School's mission is “to move the child to the center of the education process and to interrelate the several subjects of the curriculum in such a way as to enhance their meaning for the child” (Charter, October 1994). As a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools, the

Parker School will realize this mission through educational practice guided by the Ten Common Principles of Essential Schools:

1. The school should focus on helping adolescents learn to use their minds well. Schools should not attempt to be “comprehensive” if such a claim is made at the expense of the school’s central intellectual purpose.
2. The school’s goals should be simple: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. While these skills and areas will, to varying degrees, reflect the traditional academic disciplines, the program’s design should be shaped by the intellectual and imaginative powers and competencies that students need, rather than necessarily by “subjects” as conventionally defined. The aphorism “Less Is More” should dominate: curricular decisions should be guided by the aim of thorough student mastery and achievement rather than by an effort merely to cover content.
3. The school’s goals should apply to all students, while the means to these goals will vary as those students themselves vary. School practice should be tailor-made to meet the needs of every group or class of adolescents.
4. Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent. Efforts should be directed toward a goal that no teacher have direct responsibility for more than 80 students. To capitalize on this personalization, decisions about the details of the course of study, the use of students’ and teachers’ time and the choice of teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be unreservedly placed in the hands of the principal and staff.
5. The governing practical metaphor of the school should be student-as-worker rather than the more familiar metaphor of teacher-as-deliverer-of-instructional-services. Accordingly, a prominent pedagogy will be coaching, to provoke students to learn how to learn and thus to teach themselves.
6. Students entering secondary school studies are those who can show competence in language and elementary mathematics. Students of traditional high school age but not yet at appropriate levels of competence to enter secondary school studies will be provided intensive remedial work to assist them quickly to meet these standards. The diploma should be awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery for graduation: an “exhibition.” This exhibition by the student of his or her grasp of the central skills and knowledge of the school’s program may be jointly administered by the faculty and by higher authorities. As the diploma is awarded when earned, the school’s program proceeds with no strict age grading and with no system of “credits earned” by “time spent” in class. The emphasis is on the students’ demonstration that they can do important things.

7. The tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress values of unanxious expectation (“I won’t threaten you but I expect much of you”), of trust (until abused) and of decency (the values of fairness, generosity and tolerance). Incentives appropriate to the school’s particular students and teachers should be emphasized, and parents should be treated as essential collaborators.

8. The principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first (teachers and scholars in general education) and specialists second (experts in but one particular discipline). Staff should expect multiple obligations (teacher-counselor-manager) and a sense of commitment to the entire school.

9. Ultimate administrative and budget targets should include, in addition to total student loads per teacher of eighty or fewer pupils, substantial time for collective planning by teachers, competitive salaries for staff and an ultimate per pupil cost not to exceed that at traditional schools by more than 10 percent. To accomplish this, administrative plans may have to show the phased reduction or elimination of some services now provided students in many traditional comprehensive secondary schools.

10. The school should demonstrate non-discriminatory and inclusive policies, practices, and pedagogies. It should model democratic practices that involve all who are directly affected by the school. The school should honor diversity and build on the strengths of its communities, deliberately and explicitly challenging all forms of inequity and discrimination.

HISTORY

The Ten Common Principles of Essential Schools are the skeleton of Parker, its lifeblood, and its inspiration: Parker is a consistently mission-driven school. The Common Principles inform decision making throughout the school, shape its moral life, and animate its discourse. There is virtually no aspect of the school—from the classroom to the lunch line to the board table—that does not reflect and embody the Ten Common Principles.

One of Massachusetts' first charter schools, Parker was started in 1995 by area parents and teachers committed to these Principles. Nationally recognized progressive educators Ted and Nancy Sizer—leaders in the [Coalition of Essential Schools](#)—were among Parker's founders and the school is part of their legacy. Ted and Nancy served as co-principals at Parker in 1998-1999.

The Ten Common Principles are expressed in an academic program that is interdisciplinary, skills-based, and student-centered. There are no grades at Parker: student work is assessed via portfolios, using school-wide standards and rubrics. To advance through its six-year program of studies, students are required to meet the school’s standards for Divisions I, II, and III; each may do so at the rate appropriate for his or her individual development. Students demonstrate mastery of curricular standards in each Division through "Gateway Exhibitions" in which they

present and defend their academic portfolios. The final Gateway is graduation, for which students present special Graduation Portfolios that include learning from year-long independent work—their “Senior Project.”

From the outset, Parker was imagined as a charter public school for grades 7-12 where adults learn and grow alongside their students. Parker has two signature adult learning programs that are co-located with the school: the New Teachers Collaborative (NTC), an early career induction and initial licensure program; and the Sizer Teachers Center, which draws on expertise in the Parker faculty when providing professional development, coaching, and consulting support to domestic and international audiences and clients.

STUDENT BODY

There are currently 390 students enrolled in grades seven through twelve; maximum allowable enrollment is 400 and the school’s waitlists will fill the remaining available seats. Over seventy municipalities in Worcester and Middlesex Counties constitute Parker’s extensive geographical region. In any given year, students come from some forty cities and towns throughout Central Massachusetts; the student body is broadly reflective of the demographics of the sending districts in terms of race/ethnicity, special education, low income, and English learning.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Parker is governed by a Board of Trustees (the “Board”) currently comprised of parents of current students and graduates, community members, teachers, and the Principal. The Board stewards the charter, provides governance, approves policy, and leads long-term strategic planning. The ongoing work of the Board is supported by robust subcommittees that monitor finances and facilities; raise funds; and support diversity, equity, and inclusion. The Board is responsible for hiring, supervising, and evaluating the Principal/Head of School. The Board works closely with the arms-length board of the Sizer Foundation, an associated not-for-profit corporation whose mission is to support Parker.

LEADERSHIP

Parker intentionally employs a distributed authority structure that encourages teacher leadership, student voice and choice, and authentic family engagement. Parker is a “first name basis” school with strong democratic traditions and norms.

The formal organizational chart is fairly flat, with all program leaders reporting directly to the Principal/Head of School.

The school’s current Principal, Todd Sumner, is serving in his 11th year in the position and has been employed at the school since July 2011. He will finish his tenure at the end of June 2022. Program leadership at the school is exceptionally strong and stable; almost all other school leaders (deans, domain leaders, division coordinators, business manager) have been employed

at the school for more than five years. The average tenure of these current school leaders (excluding Principal) is 14 years with a range of 1 year to 26 years.

EMPLOYEES

Parker employs 72 full time employees and 8 part-time employees. Of the full-time employees, 53 provide direct service to students (74%).

FINANCE

Over the last ten years, Parker has demonstrated strong financial management to auditors, the Commonwealth, and donors. Audits of fiscal years 2011 through 2021 resulted in unqualified opinions and showed no material findings. Total end of year net assets for fiscal years 2020 and 2021 were \$3.5M and \$4.2M, respectively. Primary sources of revenue include per pupil tuition from the Commonwealth, federal/state entitlement grants, and voluntary contributions for capital and operations.

II. SCOPE OF SERVICES

The basic scope of services shall include the following:

- a. Conduct all aspects of the recruitment process as directed by the Board.
- b. Review position requirements and interview, survey, and conduct focus groups to solicit opinions from Board members, school leaders, faculty, staff, students, and families to help define the leadership attributes and leadership profile needed in Parker's Principal/Head of School.
- c. Meet with the Board and with individual Board members, as needed, to assess Board priorities, goals and objectives in order to assist the Board in determining and articulating criteria and qualifications necessary for selecting a Principal/Head of School.
- d. Work with the Board to develop a plan and timeline for the search that includes community involvement while balancing the need for confidentiality of applicants.
- e. Prepare and distribute materials to advertise position.
- f. Assist the Board in developing an appropriate compensation package for the Principal/Head of School that facilitates a successful recruitment effort.
- g. Advertise statewide and nationally to recruit a diverse pool of qualified candidates.
- h. Screen all applications using criteria to be developed with input from the Board (but provide summary of all candidates to the Board).
- i. Conduct comprehensive background checks and interviews of qualified applicants and include the results as part of the information provided to the Board for those recommended for consideration by the Board.
- j. Coordinate and facilitate the interview process.

- k. Evaluate and rank the qualified applicants in accordance with criteria developed in conjunction with the Board.
- l. Maintain strict confidentiality throughout the search process as directed by the Board.
- m. Prepare reports and recommendations to the Board, as requested at intervals established by the Board Chair.
- n. Provide any other assistance to the Board as necessary to facilitate a final selection by March 2022.

The Board aims for a new Principal/Head of School to be selected by March 2022 with a start date of July 1, 2022.

Proposal Requirements

Please provide the following information:

- a. A brief history and description of your firm including your relevant experience in providing the aforementioned services in which you are currently or in the past five (5) years have been involved. Specifically address how the firm meets the qualifications specified above.
- b. Name, address, phone, fax and email addresses of principal employees. Provide resumes of the individual(s) who will be working on this project.
- c. Indicate name and contact information of lead consultant and staff who will be assigned to the contract for the duration of the search process, through and including the hiring of a Principal/Head of School.
- d. Provide at least three (3) references of other schools or school districts with which you have worked (preferably charter public schools). Please include contact information for each.
- e. Services your firm utilizes to assist schools in identifying qualified candidates.
- f. Describe methodologies used by the firm to ensure a diverse candidate pool.
- g. Address each of the items listed in the Scope of Services. Describe the methodology used by the firm for the search process and the role of the search firm at each step in the process. Describe detailed activities that are to occur, a timeline, significant milestones, and anticipated deliverables.
- h. Describe how the Board, staff, and interested community members, including parents and students, can be involved in developing the criteria for selection of a Principal/Head of School.
- i. The firm's pricing proposal shall be a firm fixed price to include a schedule and the amount or rate of compensation desired for the services outlined in your proposal. Specifically identify all items included in the compensation schedule.

- j. Provide any additional information and comments your firm deems necessary to clearly communicate your firm’s qualifications and the process you would use to recruit a Principal/Head of School for the Board.

Evaluation Procedures

A. REVIEW

The Board reserves the right to reject all proposals, to request additional information concerning any proposals for purposes of clarification, to accept or negotiate any modification to any proposal following the deadline for receipt of all proposals and to waive any irregularities if such would serve the best interest of Parker as determined by the Board or its subcommittees. When reviewing the proposals, the Board may seek additional input from any other person the committee deems appropriate.

B. SELECTION CRITERIA

The determination of those who are qualified, interested, and available and the Board’s choice of the best qualified will be based on the following criteria:

- a. The search firm’s proposed approach to the work and how it meets the Board’s needs.
- b. Qualifications and experience relevant to the scope of work including specific experience recruiting and placing school leaders (whether called Executive Directors, Heads of School, Principals, etc.) in similar-sized schools, including the experience of the team assigned to the Parker search.
- c. Past performance as determined by recent and relevant contracts. The evaluation will be based on information obtained from references provided by the firm as well as other relevant past performance information obtained from other sources known to the Board.
- d. Fee structure.
- e. Evaluation may include discussions or negotiations with vendors. Not all vendors may be requested to enter into further discussions. Although discussions may take place, vendors are encouraged to provide their best offer initially and not anticipate discussions to make their best offer.

Timeline

Proposals must be received no later than Friday, October 1, 2021 at 12:00 p.m. Eastern. Completed proposals may be emailed, mailed, or filed in person at the address listed on page two of this RFP. Proposals received after that time and date will not be considered. The Board or its subcommittee will review all proposals received and a few finalists may be selected. These finalists may be invited to an in-person interview. Selection will be made by October 31, 2021.

Withdrawal of Proposal

Submission of a proposal shall constitute a firm offer to Parker for 60 days from the submission deadline for proposals.

A proposal may be withdrawn any time before the date and time when proposals are due, without prejudice, by submitting a written request for its withdrawal to the Parker Board.

Special Conditions

The Board reserves the right to negotiate or modify any element of the proposal to ensure that the best possible arrangements for achieving Parker's objectives are obtained.

The Board reserves the right to reject any or all proposals received as a result of this request. The Board reserves the right to award the contract for the bid that it considers to be in the best interest of Parker.

The Board reserves the right to cancel this request at any time. In addition, the Board reserves the right to cancel any contract by giving written notice.

Parker is not liable for any cost incurred during the preparation of a response to this request and prior to the issuance of a contract.