



## Head of School

PS1 Pluralistic School  
*Santa Monica, California*



### Introduction

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Founded in 1971, PS1 Pluralistic School is a K-6 independent school in Santa Monica, California, enrolling approximately 200 students in multi-age classrooms. The school's mission and philosophy are defined by pluralism and are rooted in the idea of meeting each child where they are and helping them to become the best versions of themselves. PS1 believes that innovative, empathetic, and collaborative thinkers have the potential to build a better world for all, and the best time to cultivate these habits of mind is in a child's earliest years.

PS1 stands apart thanks to a special combination of characteristics: intimate classrooms that are led by teams of exceptional faculty; a high-functioning administrative team that is well connected to the daily lives of the students; a thoughtful, dedicated, and engaged Board of Directors; an award-winning campus that supports the school's approach to learning; and a healthy, debt-free balance sheet supported by a strong endowment and a generous parent body.

Most of all, the school's truly student-centered approach has created a vibrant, inclusive, and diverse community of parents, teachers, staff, alumni, and other stakeholders who believe in the school's mission and philosophy and wish to see it continue to thrive. PS1 is a place where the natural curiosity, joys, and struggles of childhood define the educational atmosphere. It is a school where kids can be kids and be challenged and supported along the way.

For a position to begin in July 2023, PS1 seeks a Head of School to lead the institution into its next chapter following the 2022 retirement of its founding Head, Joel Pelcyger. In accordance with its Succession Plan, PS1 has named Erik Carlson as Interim Head of School for the 2022-23 school year. This is an outstanding opportunity for a confident, energetic, and empathetic leader who is eager to partner with the PS1 community to lead the school's next decade of growth and development in a manner that is true to its core mission and philosophy.

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

## Overview

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**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.*

**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** – (2021-22) 205 students, 163 families; grades K-6; nine classrooms (with two lead teachers in each), each covering two successive grade levels.

**CLASSROOM TEACHING** – In 2021-22, 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 23 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 (2021-22). The school boasts a substantial endowment and no debt. The school also owns (outright) the school campus and several additional properties that are contiguous with or very near the campus.

**TUITION & FINANCIAL AID** – Annual tuition is \$36,490 (2022-23). In 2021-22, PS1 allocated \$1.4 million in financial assistance – more than 19% of tuition revenue – to 26% of the student body.

**DIVERSITY** – Approximately half of PS1’s faculty and staff and more than 45% of students identify as BIPOC. Last year, students hailed from 38 ZIP codes and 85 different feeder schools.

**ACCREDITATION & MEMBERSHIPS** – California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS); National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS); Independent School Alliance for Minority Affairs, California Independent Schools Business Officers Association (Cal-ISOBAA)

## Culture & Philosophy

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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. PS1 helps children understand themselves as individuals and as members of many overlapping, expanding community groups.



In this way, 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 individual with the awareness and responsibility of being part of a community – whether local, global, or otherwise – gives the campus a unique energy. The education of young people at PS1 is inspiring, thoughtful, intentional, interdisciplinary, and individualized.

## Campus & Setting

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The joy of discovery and learning that draws so many families to PS1 is only enhanced by its campus in the heart of Santa Monica that has won awards for both its architecture and its



sustainability. Located about a mile from the beach and Santa Monica's famous pier, the school's neighborhood is a 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 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 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

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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. Interdisciplinary learning occurs daily and is organized around problem solving, projects, and questions in a context and for a purpose.



The PS1 faculty members are defined by their high caliber, 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.



Parents and students connect comfortably 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.

A defining feature of PS1's academic program – and one that many families celebrate – is the multi-age classrooms, which are organized in Clusters. The school has a total of nine classrooms across four Clusters: three classes in the Youngers Cluster (K-1), two classes in the Bridge Cluster (grades 2-3), two classes in the Middles Cluster (grades 3-4), and two classes in the Olders Cluster (grades 5-6). There is approximately a two-year age range in each multi-age classroom. Every child will experience being a younger student and an older student at various times during their journey through PS1.



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



There is strong demand for PS1 graduates across Los Angeles middle schools, and families are well supported in their search for a middle school program that is the best fit for their children. The most popular destinations for PS1 alumni over the past decade include: Archer School for Girls, Brentwood School, Crossroads School, Harvard-Westlake School, Marlborough School, New Roads 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.

## Administration & Governance

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The Senior Administrative Team (SAT), led by the Head of School, comprises the 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. The SAT represents a mix of newcomers and veterans with many years of experience at PS1 and other independent schools; it is a talented, collaborative group that will prove valuable to the next Head of School.



PS1's Board of Directors, which includes alumni, current parents, and alumni parents, is a dedicated and active governing body. The Board comprises volunteers who serve on multiple committees and meaningfully contribute to the school in various other ways. The Board's stewardship of the school's mission and vision have been strong and steady for many years, and Board members readily 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 planning this leadership transition.

## Opportunities and Challenges for the Next Head of PS1

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The next Head of PS1 will inherit a well-established school in an enviable financial position, a well-defined mission and philosophy, and a community united behind its distinctive brand of child-centered learning. The next Head will also benefit from the work of Interim Head Erik

Carlson, a seasoned school leader who will work with the Board 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.



It is difficult to predict the specific challenges the Head of PS1 will face in the fall of 2023, but with input from the community, the Board has identified opportunities related to the following areas (in alphabetical order):



**DEIJ** –PS1 is rightfully proud of its 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 Head of School will support PS1 as it continues to make progress in this area.

**ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT**– For most of its history, PS1 has been a selective school that has received applications from more students than it can admit. In recent years, however, increased competition and shifting demographics have required the school to redouble its recruitment efforts. Retention and placement are also critical to the school’s overall enrollment strategy. Maintaining PS1’s network of relationships with



schools across L.A. that welcome its alumni will give current and future families continued 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 Board and the Directors of Advancement and Communications – will help support PS1’s success in its marketing, enrollment, and fundraising efforts.

**STRATEGIC PLANNING** – The Board believes that these next two years, including the interim year with Mr. Carlson and the first year with the new long-term Head of School, will be an appropriate time to reflect on the needs of the school and the community it serves and to consider a variety of opportunities in front of the school, ranging from program evolution to the potential development of two adjacent parcels of land owned by the school. The Board is excited at the prospect of working with the new Head to chart a course for PS1 that addresses the school’s challenges and opportunities.



## Who Should Apply

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PS1 seeks an inspiring, approachable, open-minded, authentic, energetic, and big-hearted leader who will bring a good deal of trust, patience, and empathy to the position. The ideal leader will work with the Board to maintain PS1's positive momentum while getting to know the community, building consensus around major initiatives, and staying true to the school's core mission and philosophy.

Decision-making at PS1 is intentionally inclusive and deliberative. The appointee should have superior political instincts, outstanding speaking and listening skills, and a collaborative leadership style.

The search committee invites applications from educational leaders who are well aligned with the mission, vision, and values of PS1.



The ideal candidate will be able to:

- Champion the idea that a school should support and celebrate children as children, letting their natural curiosity and energy inspire the community and the curriculum.
- Communicate with all stakeholders in a focused, authentic way.
- Deploy expert judgment around best practices in independent school operations and management.
- Mentor and empower colleagues with thoughtfulness and care.
- Develop and collaborate with the Board of Directors.
- Think strategically, plan accordingly, and execute effectively, pivoting when necessary.
- Embrace advancement work – fundraising, enrollment management, communications, and exmissions – with genuine energy and authenticity.
- Be empathetic and remain fully present; connect easily with constituents from all walks of life.
- Lead conversations related to DEIJ with boldness and clarity, compassion and grace.
- Responsibly manage a large operating budget and multiple properties.
- Respect the traditions of the school while challenging the community to find new ways to realize its mission most effectively.



## Search Overview

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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 potential candidate, please email [admin@butlerwhite.com](mailto:admin@butlerwhite.com). To express a personal interest in this opportunity, prospective candidates should contact Butler/White Strategies via the email above and include a current resume with their message. All inquiries and nominations are confidential and should be made as soon as possible.



To formalize their application and ensure full consideration, candidates should also submit via email:

- a letter of interest,
- a statement of educational philosophy, and
- a list of five professional references. *(No references will be contacted without the applicant's permission.)*

Applicants are also welcome to submit additional materials that might help the committee better understand relevant aspects of their candidacy and potential fit with PS1.



**Butler/White  
Strategies**

*This document was co-authored by Butler/White Strategies with final approval from PS1.  
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