



Paul Cuffee School
Head of School Opportunity Statement
Providence, Rhode Island
www.paulcuffee.org

Paul Cuffee School seeks an energetic, inspiring head to lead the school as it continues its successful, forward momentum.

Introduction and History:

The Paul Cuffee School (PCS), one of thirteen Rhode Island charter schools, received approval from the Rhode Island Board of Regents in 2000 and began operation in September 2001. The school was founded by a Providence physician, Dr. Cyril Burke, who believed that the abundant learning opportunities associated with Narragansett Bay could be combined with a rigorous academic curriculum for Providence students in kindergarten through twelfth grade. His goal was to introduce sailing as well as the marine and environmental sciences to urban youth in order to expand their knowledge, abilities and future career options. A dedicated group of founders included David Burnham, the former head of Moses Brown School, who served as chair of the Board of Trustees until July 2007.

Paul Cuffee School gains its name from an inspiring individual who lived in Westport, MA at the turn of the 18th century. Cuffee, a shipbuilder and Quaker of African and Native American descent, was very successful at a time in this country's history when many people who shared his racial background were enslaved. Cuffee used his wealth to build a racially integrated school on his own property because African-American children were unable to gain access to schools in the area. He was also an influential advocate for the voting rights of free blacks.

In its first year, PCS served 136 students in kindergarten through 3rd grade. Today the school serves 486 students, grades K-8, and plans are well in place to launch a high school program with 60 students in grade 9 in the fall of 2010. David Bourns, who served as head of George School for over twenty years, has been head of school at Paul Cuffee since its launch and is retiring at the close of the current school year.

Because of its success, entrance into Paul Cuffee School is highly sought by Providence parents. Only 1 in 16 applicants are accepted through a lottery system. The school's population represents the diversity of its urban community. 80% of the students are either Hispanic or African-American and 78% qualify for free or reduced lunch. In 2007 PCS was selected as one of the top 53 charter schools in America from among 3,940 nationwide.

The school's greatest strength is its strong sense of community. It is clear that it is a place where both students and adults really like to be each day. This is also reflected in the high teacher retention rate. While there is an obvious commitment to academics, the school's educational philosophy is built on a foundation that recognizes that a child's social and emotional well-being is paramount to success in school and in life. When asked to describe the school community, students, faculty, staff and administrators consistently mention the word "respect." All PCS teachers have been trained in a social-emotional curriculum called Responsive Classroom (K-5) and Developmental Designs (6-8).

The opportunity to serve Paul Cuffee School as its second head of school offers an exciting professional challenge. While the school has a very strong foundation and is healthy and thriving, there are additional challenges for a new head to take on as the school community works to achieve the full vision of its founders—expanding through grade 12, strengthening academic programs, and further infusing the maritime theme into the school's program.

Mission and Learning Environment:

In the spirit of Paul Cuffee's life, the school teaches students to value personal initiative and social responsibility. It seeks to accomplish this through an academic program that fosters discovery, stretches thinking, and demands excellence.

PCS strives to be a community that respects each individual and responds to the needs of others. Quality of life together is central to the mission. The school provides rigorous academics, individualized teaching and hands-on learning within a school culture of mutual respect and personal responsibility. At Paul Cuffee School, teachers differentiate instruction so that all students work to their fullest potential every day.

An important part of the philosophy, consistent with Responsive Classroom and Development Designs, is establishing a series of practices, such as morning meeting, that help create a predictable, calm learning environment. Teachers interact with students respectfully, while modeling and facilitating peer communication, problem-solving and other social skills that are key to maintaining an inclusive school community.

School program and organization:

There are 3 classes of 18 students per grade in the lower school (K-5), housed in a school-owned, bright, cheerful building on Promenade Street. The middle school of 140 students is currently housed in rented space in a former parochial school building that is a five minute drive from the lower school. The school's leadership is currently investigating numerous options to house the high school program, and long-term plans include purchasing land contiguous to the lower school building and finding a permanent home for the middle and high school programs. The Board has planned carefully, and funds have been set aside to support the school's facility needs.

The Board of Trustees, which currently has 21 members, includes friends of the school, faculty, administrators and current parents. Much of the work of the Board is carried out through committees that work closely with the head of school on policy, fiscal oversight, strategic planning and appropriate "big picture" leadership items. The Board meets six times per year, and Board meetings are open to all interested constituents.

A strong administrative team supports the head of school's leadership. This team includes middle and lower school academic heads, an advancement director, business manager, and an admissions director; a search for a high school principal is currently underway.

Teaching faculty include lead teachers in grades K-5, subject teachers in the middle school and teaching partners at each grade level as well as Special Education and Title I instructors. Specialists include a Librarian, Technology, Physical Education, Spanish, and Integrated Arts instructors. The school has a dedicated administrative support staff.

Strong after school programs at each campus offer PCS students enrichment, athletic and social opportunities in addition to homework support in a safe environment.

Opportunities and Challenges:

There are many challenges inherent in running an urban charter school with a majority student population that is often described as "at risk." The school's many successes thus far have come about as a result of tremendous hard work and commitment from a loyal team of educators, staff and volunteers. Keeping these numerous partners-in-success engaged, especially as the school transitions to new leadership, as well as recruiting and motivating additional supporters will continue to insure the school's strong foundation and sense of community. Success will also require that the new head of school explore ways to continue to engage parents in the life of the school.

As the school expands by opening the high school program, the management of that expansion will bring its own set of challenges. In particular, infusing the high school with the strong “Paul Cuffee way” culture as well as balancing this with the needs of the lower and middle school—all three in different locations—will test the head’s ability to be seen as visible and accessible. In the longer term, working with the Board to insure appropriate and secure facilities to support all school programs will be an important task.

Numerous faculty spoke of a hope to see the school’s maritime theme reflected more visibly in the school’s curriculum and programs going forward. Thus far the theme pops up in many small ways but the need to insure that students develop solid competencies in basic academic skills, as well as the school’s commitment to the social and emotional growth of students, has taken precedence. Moreover, some parents and faculty share a desire to see the school better meet the needs of the most academically capable students, with the added benefit of retaining more of these students into the middle and coming high school programs.

Balancing the pace of change with the implementation of new programs will be important as the new head of school steps in to lead a community composed of many members who have been part of the school since its beginning. The shared spirit of doing all it can has led some to feel that more and more is heaped on the plate with nothing coming off. At the same time, there is clear recognition that expanding programs that benefit school families will also benefit the students’ futures and successes. The new head will need to lead and manage the conversations about focus, priorities and the appropriate pace of additions and changes.

Leadership Needs:

Paul Cuffee School seeks an experienced, successful educator and administrator who will enthusiastically embrace and support the PCS community, mission and culture, and who:

- Is a person of energy and vision who has the ability to excite and motivate others towards goals
- Is a strong communicator, listener and effective manager
- Has strong leadership and community building skills
- Successfully balances the solicitation of input and decisiveness
- Is a visible, accessible leader who will interact gracefully and good-humoredly with the wide range of constituents who make up the PCS community

Paul Cuffee School seeks a head of school who ideally has teaching experience and who preferably has experience in an urban setting as an educator or a

community organizer. Candidates with charter school experience and/or the ability to communicate effectively in Spanish will be of particular interest to the search committee.

The new head of school will need to be an individual willing and able to build connections in the greater Providence community on behalf of Paul Cuffee School. This includes a need to understand and become involved in the state's political scene as a part of successfully leading a charter school.

It is important to note that because of the experiences of the school's head of school and the founding Board chair, the school shares many characteristics frequently seen at independent schools. Charter schools are often described as hybrids of public and private schools, and Paul Cuffee School certainly could be described as such. The strong, invested community, absence of a union presence, a commitment to the social-emotional well-being of its students and a culture that emphasizes respect, offer an independent school-like atmosphere with an urban population that for the most part would not find its way to a traditional independent school. The reality of a lottery for admission as well as the need for special education services are challenges that insure that Paul Cuffee School needs to work to serve each admitted student well.

Additional Information:

Paul Cuffee School, like all Rhode Island Charter Schools, receives funding from the Rhode Island Department of Education to support teacher salaries, special services and core educational programs for each child in attendance. The school's development team seeks support for facilities and to supplement the school's operating budget. Additionally, the generosity of corporations, foundations, the Board, families and friends supports enrichment programs such as swimming lessons for each child, music instruction, theater, dance instruction, professional development, field trips, library books and resources, classroom supplies and computer equipment.

For Consideration:

Please send:

- Resume
- Letter of Interest
- Educational Philosophy and/or Personal Statement

To:

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