



Curtis School

# Position Statement Director of Advancement Curtis School

Los Angeles, CA

Start Date: July 1, 2024





# Director of Advancement Position Statement



## THE OPPORTUNITY

“It’s the best thing that ever happened to our lives since we moved here to Los Angeles twenty-three years ago.” This, from a parent of two boys, at Curtis School about how impactful the school has been for them ... and reinforced by testimonials from other parents about this beautiful school that is perched on top of famous Mulholland Drive in the Sepulveda Pass of Los Angeles.

Curtis School is a co-ed, day school, grades DK-6, enrolling 494 students that is looking for their next Director of Advancement to join Meera Ratnesar, the Head of School, and her talented administrative team to lead the school.

## MISSION AND HISTORY

The mission—then, and still today—is to develop, in every child, a sound mind in a sound body, governed by a compassionate heart. At Curtis School, each lesson, exploration, and experience begins with the child: What do they need to feel a true and lasting connection to their learning?

The school honors all that’s known about children developmentally to empower them academically, emotionally, and socially so that learning is forever joyful. Curtis School continues to set the standard for elementary education in the Greater Los Angeles area and beyond.

Curtis School opened its doors in 1925 when Carl Curtis founded Curtis School. From its inception, Curtis School focused on developing children with sound minds, sound bodies, good character, the ability to reach their full potential, and the willingness to be of service to others. After Carl Curtis’s death, his nephew and protégé, Carl F. Curtis, carried on this educational mission.

Willard E. Badham became headmaster in 1964 and ran the school for three decades, during which time, Curtis grew from a school of less than 100 students to one of the largest and most respected independent elementary schools in Los Angeles. It moved to its present location in 1983.

Clay V. Stites became Headmaster in 1992 when Willard Badham retired. Formerly Headmaster of Friends Academy in North Dartmouth, Massachusetts, Stites revitalized the academic programs and oversaw the Curtis 2000 campaign that enabled the school to build many of the modern facilities Curtis enjoys today. (Full disclosure: Clay Stites was one of the founders of RG175, the search firm that is conducting this search.)



# Director of Advancement Position Statement



## GOVERNANCE AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Curtis School is governed by a 20-member Board of Trustees. The board's non-voting attendees include the head of school, president of the Parents Association (PA), the president of the Alumni Council, the CFO, the COO and the Director of Advancement. Members of the board of trustees, other than the administrative members and the PA representatives, are nominated and confirmed in rotation at the annual meeting of the corporation to serve for two- or three- year terms of up to three years. The board meets monthly during the school year. There are seven Board Committees: Executive, Audit, Buildings and Grounds, Committee on Trustees, Advancement Annual Fund, Finance, and Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity.

The Board of Trustees works alongside the Head of School to craft and oversee the school's mission, vision and its short and long-term strategic goals, review and support important school policies and plans, ensure resources are adequately provisioned and effectively managed for the short and long-term, establish and maintain bylaws and ensure the School's compliance with applicable laws and regulation, and promote and advance the School's mission. Trustees do not have authority over the day-to-day operations of the school. As leaders in the Curtis School community, trustees are expected to support the school through

their advocacy and ambassadorship, their time and expertise, and their philanthropic efforts.

Curtis parent Craig Varnen serves on the Board of Trustees as Chair. A partner at the law firm of Gibson Dunn & Crutcher, Craig is an experienced trial attorney whose practice focuses on complex commercial litigation, with an emphasis on defending companies and their boards of directors and corporate officers in securities-related lawsuits and regulatory proceedings. Craig is also regularly retained to provide advice on issues of fiduciary duty, conduct high profile internal investigations, and handle cases involving trade secrets and employment contracts. He is the Chair of Gibson Dunn's national Securities Litigation Practice Group.

The 7th Head of School is Meera Ratnesar. Dr. Ratnesar came to Curtis from Harbor Day School in Corona del Mar, California, where she was Head of the Upper School (Grades 5-8) for five years. Prior to that, she worked at the Baldwin School in Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, the Trevor Day School in New York, and the Collegiate School in New York.

Meera has taught every grade from Kindergarten through high school and is a curriculum expert with a particular expertise in mathematics. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Mathematics from Bryn Mawr and was a prestigious Klingenstein Fellow at Columbia's Teachers College. She holds a Doctor of Education degree from the University of Pennsylvania.

Meera has 20 years of experience in independent school education and administration. She has implemented a number of initiatives that are designed to keep Curtis on the leading edge in all areas of the school's administration, programs, instructional strategies, and curriculum.

Meera is well-liked by parents, students, faculty, administrators and her easy and well-grounded manner, sense of humor, and interest in the students is evident to even the first-time visitor.



# Director of Advancement Position Statement



## CURTIS SCHOOL AT A GLANCE

|                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Founded                               | 1925  |
| Grades                                | DK through 6  |
| Campus size                           | 27 acres  |
| Enrollment, 2023-2024                 | 494 students (from 50 zip codes; 46% identify as students of color) |
| Tuition, 2023-2024                    | \$36,124; new student fee: \$1,500                                  |
| Operating budget (projected, 2024-25) | \$21 million  |
| Endowment (as of June 30, 2023)       | \$35 million  |
| Financial aid                         | \$2,250,000   |



# Director of Advancement Position Statement



## FACULTY

Curtis School faculty are exceptional. They are deeply committed to the school and its mission, grateful to be a part of its warm and welcoming community, and excited to have the opportunity to share their knowledge and love of learning with children. The faculty know how to safely and respectfully stretch students because they deeply understand what's happening for young people at a developmental level. 33% of the faculty identify as people of color.

The faculty are dedicated to bringing their best skills and commitment to each child. They play many roles, from the more obvious one of working with students in creative and inspiring ways to the less obvious of volunteering to cover a colleague's duty, serving on a committee, coaching a sports team, or attending admissions open house events.

Curtis School faculty are committed to the learning process, as illustrated by the hundreds of combined hours they spend in professional development workshops furthering their own learning. They explore topics like differentiation, formative assessment, and writing across disciplines. Each summer, teachers are students: online, in university classes, doing independent research, or attending conferences. Every one of the School's lead faculty have advanced degrees, and most are highly experienced in the classroom.



## THE STUDENTS

Whether it is meeting students one on one, walking around campus or watching activity on the play fields, one sees energetic, funny, creative and adorable students. Other adjectives might include "healthy, wholesome, open, bright and optimistic." In brief, Curtis is a school filled with good children who graduate with their curiosity and sense of possibility intact.





# Director of Advancement Position Statement



Because the school recognizes students' individuality and understands them as works-in-progress, there is intelligence and intentionality in the way students are helped and guided through childhood. Through a tremendous variety of non-academic offerings, students engage unconsciously in social learning, beginning with class morning meetings and continuing throughout their day. A robust sports program is the outlet to self-discovery for some, while for others it may be the orchestra or the debate team or the robotics team or student government or a community service initiative. The beautiful campus supports and nurtures a sense of independence and security in even the youngest of students. The mantra around Curtis seems to be the joy of learning and not one of stress one may encounter at other schools.

The result is a balanced life for the students, not one dominated by homework or pedantic, busy-work assignments. Learning for its own sake takes place along the way from Developmental Kindergarten to Sixth Grade and Curtis students graduate with an ingrained desire to work hard, play fair and do well.

They seem to know that true self-esteem is the product of hard work and solid accomplishment, not a high grade or a medal for just showing up. A by-product is the remarkable secondary school placement that Curtis students enjoy; they swell the ranks of all the top Middle and Upper schools in the LA area.

## THE CURTIS COMMUNITY

Parents are comfortable releasing their kids into the School's care, knowing that they will be tended to in a palpable atmosphere of nurturing, caring and love.

Curtis students come from many ZIP codes and neighborhoods across Los Angeles. With an enrollment of 494 and 46% racial and ethnic diversity, the school has in recent years reached into parts of the city where it was previously unknown. The result of these efforts is a student body that is refreshingly diverse.



# Director of Advancement Position Statement



Recognizing that diversity does not automatically translate into inclusivity, the Administration, faculty and Parents Association have worked hard to make all students and families feel thoroughly at home and those efforts have paid off.

As one parent put it recently, “Nobody raves about their school the way Curtis parents do,” and people familiar with schools around L.A. tend to agree. Indeed, not only are Curtis parents enamored of their school, they also work for it and contribute to it and go on to be the workers and doers at the secondary schools their children go on to attend.

Putting their parental shoulders to the wheel means volunteering to help with grade level coffees, Grandparents Day, leading tours during Admission Open Houses in addition to running the Curtis Fair (one of the largest and most successful school fairs in Southern California), the Book Spree, community service and Curtis Celebrates! along with offering Adult Enrichment speakers and a Children’s Enrichment program for the students.

A recent example of the programming the Parents Association sponsors is a panel on the “Tapestry of Faith, intersection Perspectives” that included faith leaders Muizz Kreraj, CFA of Ismaili Center and Jamatkhana, Rabbi Joel Nickerson of Wilshire Boulevard Temple, and Drew Sams, D. Min of Bel Air Presbyterian Church. In the safe space that defines Curtis, an honest and heartfelt exploration of how diverse faith traditions can help build a more inclusive and harmonious society was held not just for parents but also with curious and thoughtful students. This was done in the shadow of the Israel-Hamas war and plight of the hostages in Gaza, with particular urgency in the discussion brought by the first birthday of the youngest captive, Kfir Bibas.

In a city synonymous with glitz and stars, Curtis is thankfully free of such trappings. Once through the gate, there is one common bond – all are part of the Curtis community and that’s all that counts. Normalcy is the order of the day on the Curtis campus.



# Director of Advancement Position Statement



## THE CAMPUS

Sitting astride the Santa Monica Mountains that divide Los Angeles from the San Fernando Valley, Curtis has a superb location and a gorgeous 27-acre campus. Easy access to major freeways makes transportation to and from school relatively easy and, once there, the campus is ideally laid out for elementary school children with significant room for outdoor activity and instruction. As one teacher puts it, “Curtis has fresh air, green grass, birds singing and kids running around in the sunshine.” Another faculty member commented, both literally and metaphorically, “We are gardeners, growing the future.”

The nine-building campus includes:

- a Library/Tech and Administrative complex (two buildings)
- two separate buildings for the primary division (DK-2)
- a separate classroom building for grade three
- separate classroom buildings for grades four and five
- a separate classroom building for grade six and Science
- a visual and performing arts complex
- a stand-alone gymnasium (that incorporates an elevated stage for performances).
- a geodesic dome greenhouse

There is a spacious athletic field that can comfortably accommodate two soccer or flag-football games at the same time – a prized asset for a school with an interscholastic athletic program in the top three grades – and there is also a pool, as Curtis is committed to making all its students water-safe. There is a butterfly garden, rock wall, outdoor basketball courts, and three age-appropriate playgrounds.

The location puts part of the city’s cultural attractions literally at the school’s feet with the Skirball Center and the Getty Center right down the hill. Other cultural meccas are easily accessed, including the renowned LA Philharmonic, the celebrated LA County Museum, the pre-historic LaBrea Tar Pits, Natural History Museum, Grauman’s Chinese Theater and the star-studded Walk of Fame. UCLA and its marvelous medical center are nearby and the beaches of the Pacific Ocean are not very far away. Opportunities for golf, hiking, biking, running, and water sports abound and it is possible to ski and surf in the same day. For sports lovers, there is big-time college football at USC and UCLA and professional baseball (Dodgers and Angels), basketball (Lakers and Clippers), and hockey (Kings and Ducks). For out-of-town visitors, Universal Studios is within fifteen minutes of campus and Disneyland is about an hour away.





# Director of Advancement Position Statement



## FINANCES AND FUNDRAISING

The school's budget is \$21M, with approximately \$2,250,000 of that designated for financial aid. Tuition is \$36,124. The school recently secured a successful \$25M bond offering to finance their impending capital campaign. The school has a \$35M endowment that has not been previously availed and allowed to grow; interest on the loan will be paid with a 3% availment.

Long-term plans for salaries and benefits and understanding the school's overall fundraising capacity for increasing financial aid along with improvements to facilities are strategic initiatives that lie ahead.

The next step in the Envision Our Future strategic plan is to "Think Forward" and facilitate interaction between classrooms, subjects, grade levels in a 21,000 sq. foot 3-story building that will house all arts, science and technology classrooms under one roof. The building is designed for reimagining how to engrain principles of collaboration with elementary school learners so they can seamlessly follow their passions—wherever they lead. This is the CLIC—the Collaborative Learning and Innovation Center. Education of the Board and their responsibility to lead the school in this vital improvement is continuing.

2022-2023 annual Giving (The Curtis Fund) was \$ 2,069,671 (cash in; online giving represented 46% of the total), with total giving of \$2.804 million. Total giving includes Annual Giving, Library Fund, Alumni Community Grant, Financial Aid Fund, and capital gifts. There are aspects of Annual Giving where some changes may lead to higher totals. The CLIC campaign is in its incipient stages and would benefit from someone who is fluent in major gifts, solicitation, and stewardship.

The advancement office includes (full-time) Melissa Malone, Special Events and Alumni Relations Senior Manager, and Sandra McGarry (part-time) Advancement Manager whose principal duty is the Annual Fund. The incumbent Director of Advancement, Corinne Schulman is retiring after 8 years of service to the community. Hilary Manners is the Director of Communications and Marketing; Dede Haglund is the School Archivist and Editor.

Donor support at Curtis is considerable and there is significant capacity. The advancement office needs to navigate the terrain of changing demographics, high expectations, and where Curtis is headed as the school embarks on this next exciting chapter of school history. This position is about finding resources for the faculty, staff and students at Curtis; but it also about being an active part of the community and collaborative conversations to keep Curtis at the forefront of education in the Los Angeles area.

## THE POSITION: DIRECTOR OF ADVANCEMENT

Reporting to the Head of School, the Director of Advancement (DOA) works closely with the Head of School and the Board of Trustees, including staffing the Advancement Committee. The DOA provides visionary leadership to the advancement of the school's mission, vision and goals, while at the same time deepening constituent relations (parents, grandparents, parents of alumni, alumni and friends), in coordination with communications and marketing programs. The DOA also serves as liaison to the Parents Association, although these duties may be shifted in an office realignment.

The candidate should be someone with a track record of achievement developing and advancing fundraising strategy with measurable success, a comprehensive knowledge of fundraising best practices, and a desire to have a significant impact on the school's growing program.

# Director of Advancement Position Statement



## Responsibilities

- Work closely with the Board of Trustees as well as its advancement, finance and planning committees to formulate goals and strategies for present and future fundraising needs, alumni relations and communications as they relate to defined goals, procedures, staffing, budget and timetables. The candidate should have the “hustle” gene.
- Support the Head of School and Board President in their cultivation and development outreach activities. Provides support to the Head of School in fulfilling her advancement responsibilities, ensuring prudent use of her time.
- Develop, lead and implement strategies to enhance annual giving and capital gifts programs, including annual development plan: appeals, timeline, messaging and campaign publications.
- Provide strategic direction to Events and Alumni Relations Senior Manager for involvement and outreach alumni programming.
- Lead community engagement plan through initiatives and community building events, annual gala planning and other special events.
- Work closely with the Director of Communications and Marketing on the annual report and magazine, alumni cultivation publications and social media initiatives.
- Work closely with the parents’ association executive team and committees as well as grade parents in a collaborative partnership to support their annual events and initiatives and building community.
- Develop appropriate training and oversee staff professional development; conduct evaluations for staff reporting directly to this position.
- Work as a member of Curtis School’s strategic leadership team.
- Provides periodic analysis of advancement program results and status to the Head and the Board of Trustees.
- Represents Curtis effectively to its internal and external publics, including serving as spokesperson for Curtis on key issues and projects.
- Personally contacts, develops relationships, solicits, and stewards major gift prospects and donors, assisting them in presenting appropriate proposals and completing major gift agreements and planning for long-range plans for donors’ involvement in the life of the school.
- Oversight of:
  - internal and external communications to develop an appreciation of the School’s mission, vision and goals.
  - marketing efforts to expand and enhance the School’s visibility, image, and reputation.
  - consistency of brand positioning and communication of the school’s key messages that reflect its direction, mission, and values and ensure such messages are utilized consistently throughout the organization.
  - an overarching publications strategy and timetable that meets Curtis’ evolving strategic needs.
  - content development and maintenance of online-based communications including website, intranet, and social networking sites; oversee maintenance of digital assets such as photographs and other various media.
  - all media relations activities on behalf of the school to ensure visibility and in support of the overall goals of the organization.
  - refinement and implementation of anticipatory strategies for crisis communications; develop dissemination programs to educate the Curtis School community about emergency procedures.



# Director of Advancement Position Statement



## Qualifications:

- Commitment to Curtis School's mission.
- B.A. degree required; advanced degree(s) preferred.
- Minimum of ten years work experience required in the development field, preferably at an independent school.
- A proven track record of progressively challenging fundraising success, including annual operating support, major gifts, capital campaigns and planned giving.
- Strong working knowledge of Raiser's Edge
- Strong written and personal communications skills and vision for expanded communication opportunities.
- Strong background in annual giving, including leadership programs, alumni reunion, and other constituent relations programs.
- Experience in event and community engagement planning and execution.
- Ability to support advancement services: research, prospect tracking, stewardship, gift entry, gift acknowledgement, and data entry.
- Significant experience overseeing alumni programming designed to support comprehensive needs of a broad constituency.
- Demonstrated ability to personally and effectively identify, cultivate, and secure gifts from the annual fund and major gift prospects.
- Strong management experience required with the ability and interest to work closely with staff members to achieve individual and department goals.
- Outstanding analytical skills and proven success in using data-analytics and prospect wealth screening resources to develop programs and drive results.
- Demonstrated ability to build successful fundraising initiatives and appeals using current best-practices and new technologies to produce outstanding results.
- Strong and demonstrated success in leading, managing and dealing diplomatically and comfortably with a diverse community of parents, students, alumni, volunteers, partners and colleagues and have the presence, demeanor, and communication skills necessary to represent all of Curtis School's constituency effectively; excellent responsiveness to all constituencies.
- Vision, creativity, flexibility, and the capacity to develop a departmental strategic plan for raising philanthropic support to execute the school's strategic plan.
- Core belief in leading diversity, equity, and inclusion work forward in schools.
- Strong understanding of current digital communications, social media, fundraising software, and email-based solicitations.
- The personality, energy, intellectual integrity, warmth, visibility and leadership ability to inspire a school community; positive, passionate, can-do spirit.
- Understanding of independent school communities and culture, including an eagerness to work hard as both leader and team member.
- The ability to meet deadlines within the context of a complex office/school/community calendar.
- Leads from the front, confronts challenges head-on with appropriate transparency, building trust across all constituent groups within the school community.
- Active engagement in professional development and understanding of current best practices.
- Demonstrated ability to use good judgment and maintain confidentiality.
- Personable, positive, helpful personality; customer-service mindset.
- Sensitivity, discretion, and a sense of humor.
- Detail oriented with excellent organizational skills.
- Ability to manage and prioritize multiple responsibilities simultaneously.

# Director of Advancement Position Statement



- Ability to manage competing demands, and adapt to frequent or unexpected changes.
- Active listener and skillful communicator who is approachable, empathetic, and compassionate.
- Effective manager of people and resources who hires well and delegates appropriately.

## **Are You the Right Person for the Job?**

- Do you have the vision and strategic thinking to lead, strengthen and maximize an institution that wants to be “smart,” wise, professional in its operations, and committed to continual improvement?
- Are you committed to getting to know the children and the families well, i.e. on a first-name basis? Do you enjoy getting to know, meet and engage families?
- Are you an excellent listener?
- Do people enjoy spending time with you?
- Do you have a growth mindset? Are you comfortable with an experimental and entrepreneurial work environment? Do you think creatively and encourage innovation? Are you a curious person?
- Can you encourage and actively support change and innovation while retaining the core values and traditions of a school?
- Do you know how to prioritize your responsibilities? Do you know how to use technology to maximize your time? Do you know how to delegate?
- Do you have the ability to lead, develop and manage well in all directions?
- Are you willing “to roll up your sleeves” for all the work that is needed?
- Do you get things done?
- Do you have the personality to embrace and support a dedicated and diverse community of faculty, staff, students, parents and alumni?

- Do you understand the cadence and rhythm of a school year? What are examples of how you work with your colleagues in a collegial manner?
- Do you have a track record of success as a fundraiser and implementing a strategy? What is your level of experience in communicating the narrative of an institution?
- Have you had experience in a capital campaign?
- Do you have business and financial savvy?
- Do you have facility with equity and inclusion work required to embrace and support a diverse and dedicated community of faculty, staff, students, parents, and alumni?
- Are you a person of strength, gentleness, and authenticity?
- Are you comfortable with the locational realities of Los Angeles as a major metropolitan center, knowing that Curtis School has a culture and personality all its own?

## **TRAVEL**

Moderate overnight travel occasionally required. A valid driver's license and passport required.

## **WORK COMPLEXITY**

Duties and tasks in this position are varied and complex. The position works on whole problems or projects. This position directs projects and the challenges are resolved with complex and precedent setting solutions. This position requires a high degree of collaboration.

## **EDUCATION**

Bachelor's degree required; Advanced degree and/or professional credentials preferred.



# Director of Advancement Position Statement



## FOR CANDIDATES

The successful candidate will receive a compensation package that includes a competitive salary, tuition remission, and strong health and retirement benefits. The anticipated salary range is \$180,000-210,000.

This job description is not designed to cover or contain a comprehensive listing of activities, duties or responsibilities that are required of the employee. Other duties, responsibilities and activities may change or be assigned at any time with or without notice.

Curtis School is fully committed to a culturally diverse faculty and student body. The school will always be maintained as a non-sectarian institution. The school is an equal opportunity employer. The school complies with all legal requirements in connection with admissions and access to programs, facilities and employment practices regardless of race, color, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, genetics, age, or disability.

Prior to submitting your resume for this position, please read it for accuracy. RG175 verifies academic credentials for its candidates and conducts a thorough review of candidates' social media presence. Curtis School will conduct thorough background checks prior to finalizing an offer.

## TO APPLY

If the possibilities in this opportunity excite you, please apply online at the RG175 website: <https://rg175.com/candidate/signup>

The application includes:

- Letter detailing interest in the position and suitability for it
- Updated curriculum vitae or resume
- Copy of original writing on any subject of interest to the candidate that can be written for this exercise or provided from something written previously

**Timeline:** Application submission screening and interviews will be completed on a rolling basis until filled.

For any questions or additional information about the position, please contact either of the RG175 consultants: James E. Pattison [jpattison@rg175.com](mailto:jpattison@rg175.com) or Emilie Henry [emilie.henry@rg175.com](mailto:emilie.henry@rg175.com)