



Position Statement
Head of School Search
Black Pine Circle School

Berkeley, California
Start Date: July 1, 2025



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Overview

Black Pine Circle, a kindergarten to 8th grade school in Berkeley, California, marries challenging academics with a high-caliber arts program and blends Socratic discourse with a deep commitment to diversity. From its founding in 1973, the school has embraced the power of inquiry at the heart of progressive pedagogy. Curiosity is stoked at Black Pine Circle, and questions are encouraged. The school has always understood that children need to be both seen and heard as they are enveloped in a warm and genuine community of learners. The school's ethos is grounded and whimsical; learning is hands-on, and inquiry, innovation, improvisation, and imagination are encouraged and nurtured.

Fifty years ago, Black Pine Circle was founded by three University of California professors who sought a school that embraced each child's innate curiosity and allowed unfettered exploration and discovery guided by excellent teachers. Before opening its doors as a school, the founders invited well-known "movers and shakers" as guest lecturers for adults. They also created a dynamic summer program of mathematics, science and arts, serving students who were not sufficiently challenged. Black Pine Circle opened its first kindergarten in a church. Over its five decades, the School's facilities have grown to include a lower school (K-5) building (a former stained glass facility), a middle school (6-8) building (a former Jewish day school), and the Berkeley landmarked "Workingman's Hall," which was transformed into the Facility for Arts and Drama (FAD) building. The school has been in steady growth mode with regard to its campus, adding a climbing wall, a small garden, a beautiful library, an innovative science building, and purchasing a neighboring house to use as administrative office space. Most recently, the school has acquired two neighboring buildings with tremendous promise for adding needed large-group gathering, performing arts, and/or classroom spaces.

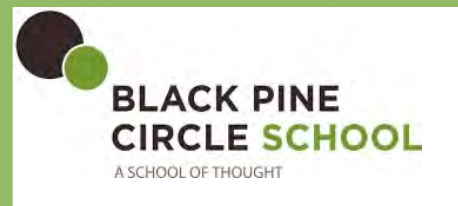
Black Pine Circle is a joyous community; children know one another across the grades and welcome

newcomers. Some students join throughout lower school, where there is one section per grade, while the biggest influx of approximately 30-40 new students join in the middle school, where there are three sections per grade. Relationships within and among constituencies are warm, and parents describe the remarkable speed with which their children feel at home upon joining the BPC community.

Looking ahead to the 2024-2025 school year, Black Pine Circle has hired an Interim Head. Furthermore, a long-standing Black Pine Circle teacher and Dean of Students will serve as the Interim Upper School Head. The Interim Head will follow a beloved Head of School who has been there for 19 years. Described as "infectiously whimsical," John Carlstroem has assured that the school lives its mission, has stewarded its consistent strong growth, and has led with flexibility and creativity, always putting the students first. Well-versed in Socratic practices and progressive school pedagogy, John has passed along these skills such that the interim leadership team will steward the school forward while searching for the next long-term head.



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Mission and Values

To create a learning community that encourages humanity, empathy, moral depth, cultural understanding and intellectual freedom.

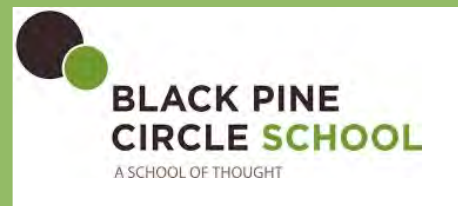
Black Pine Circle's four fundamental values: Curiosity, Community, Inquiry, Voice



The Numbers

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|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Grades: | K-8 |
| Students: | 321 (117, Lower School) (204 Upper School) |
| Students Receiving Financial Assistance: | 30% (1.6M of total budget) |
| Students of Color (self-identified): | 40% |
| Chickens hatched and living on campus: | 4 |
| Faculty and Staff: | 78 (full and part-time faculty, 19 Admin) |
| Average Faculty Tenure: | 10.5 years |
| Zip Codes in Student Body: | 33 |
| Campus Size: | 1.2 acres, 8 buildings |
| Annual Budget: | \$12M (24-25 school year) |
| Annual Fund: | \$500K (22-23 school year equaling approx. 4% of the budget) |
| School-owned musical instruments: | TOO many to list here (35 Ukuleles, 50 Classical guitars and more!!) |

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The Program

Academics: Black Pine Circle is justifiably proud of its exceptional program. From its state-level award-winning mathematics team to its genuinely engaging, inquiry-based science program, and beautifully sequenced programs for readers, writers and historians, the academic program at Black Pine Circle is widely known as both rigorous and imaginative. Whether tackling reading in “Ten Genres in Ten Weeks,” crafting “mystery haikus” or joining NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month), teachers create challenges that strengthen students’ critical thinking skills. They also invite creative and innovative problem-solving and are, by student description, “just plain fun!” Teachers and parents alike are drawn to the “zone of proximal development” concept and speak openly of their hope that students feel “safe, but not comfortable!” In the academic program, teachers present rich problems that offer a “low floor and high ceiling, [with] concrete models for students who need extra support, and extensions for those who require additional challenge.” Assessment includes “POU” (Performances of Understanding) and a variety of authentic demonstrations of learning.

From its founding, the school has emphasized math, science and the arts, and encouraged teachers to integrate the disciplines liberally. Classrooms and halls are filled with examples of artists sharing drawings of scientific learning, or writers tackling historical themes. Learning is lively at Black Pine Circle; as one student remarked, “We never do boring stuff!”

Artistic Expression: The arts program at Black Pine Circle is renowned, with evidence of artistic engagement in every nook and cranny of the school, and the sounds of a lively music program filling the halls. Every student at Black Pine Circle plays an instrument, whether recorder, ukulele, violin or

trumpet; the school’s music program is a signature program and deservedly so. The Upper School jazz band regularly wins awards at festivals. The arts program’s connection to the academic strength of the school has been manifest from its earliest years:

“The link between the physical practice of music and strong mathematical abilities has been demonstrated in studies that show that children who play a musical instrument can perform more complex arithmetical operations than those who do not play an instrument. At [Black Pine Circle], it’s not uncommon for the star of our volleyball team to excel on the Math Team....and be a wizard on saxophone.”



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The Program, continued

Delight in the visual arts is manifest throughout the school, with student-created posters, beautifully illustrated science projects and plenty of evidence of a robust program on the walls and in the classrooms.

Personal and Social Development: Black Pine Circle prides itself on its diversity of learners, and provides differentiated instruction and student support services for those who need remediation, acceleration, and/or social and emotional support. The student support services team includes counselors and learning specialists who partner with both teachers and parents to help children work through challenges that may impact social and academic potential or to enhance and extend the curriculum for students who are hungry for more.

Community of Learners: One of the most significant differentiators of Black Pine Circle is its Socratic approach to teaching and learning. Teachers use this method to create classroom environments where questions and strategies for understanding lead to better facts and answers. As one teacher commented, the School's Socratic approach "stimulates intellectual bravery and honesty" and allows discussions to "retain their sharp edges" without muting the voices of any participants. In many ways, Socratic discourse is the "special sauce" of Black Pine Circle and the central reason parents extoll the school's ability to center critical thinking in the academic growth of every student.



Community

"Black Pine Circle is an amazing community of curious students and engaged parents. Students are treated with respect and encouraged to take risks, make mistakes and discover their voices. Parents are involved at the level of engagement that fits their family's lifestyle." - Black Pine Circle Parent

This "down to earth" school community finds joy in learning and is representative of many diverse backgrounds. Both parents and students across the grades take pride in the strength of the academic program, the high-quality faculty, and the close student-teacher relationships. Furthermore, community members have many opportunities to connect across different ethnicities, cultures, family structures and personalities.

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Parents: Black Pine Circle parents are engaged and care deeply about the quality of learning. The parent community includes many who teach or work at UC Berkeley, and an array of other professions, including technology such as East Bay-based Pixar, non-profit management, the arts, music, and laboratory sciences. The school transcended its “best kept secret” status many years ago and is a sought-after haven for families throughout the East Bay. Families at the school represent a broad array of diversity from socio-economic or geographic to ethnic, gender, faith traditions, family structures and race.

Students: Students at Black Pine Circle are encouraged to be themselves, and there are many paths to belonging. Students will tell visitors that this is a school where they can be “quirky” and move within different groups easily. Many BPC students are gifted, with parents eager for them to pursue their passions, ask questions and steer their learning. On any given day, if visitors wander into the yard/play space, they will see diverse groups of students playing hoops, drawing in sketchbooks, doing magic tricks or reading Shakespeare aloud. The next day, those groups will be mixed differently. Students are joyous and spirited, and they care for one another.

Faculty: As drivers of the strong program, the Black Pine Circle faculty is highly regarded by both parents and students. This group is devoted to the School’s mission and values and deeply respects the art and craft of teaching. Because of their commitment to different student learners, teachers are talented at using a broad array of tools to make their classrooms places of inquiry and engagement; they pride themselves on providing the right level of challenge and joy for their students. A recent staff-wide “engagement survey” notes that the Black Pine Circle faculty clearly understand how their work contributes to the school's goals, understand what it takes to be successful there, and appreciate the autonomy they are given to perform their work.

“Our child is at BPC almost ten hours a day and she loves every moment of it! She enters through the gate of the school skipping in the mornings and is frustrated if we pick her up early in the afternoon.” —BPC Parent



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"I am grateful that at this school, we can talk about problems. We discuss racism, sexuality, and nationality freely. We are all open. We help each other. We are kind."

—BPC 7th Grade Student

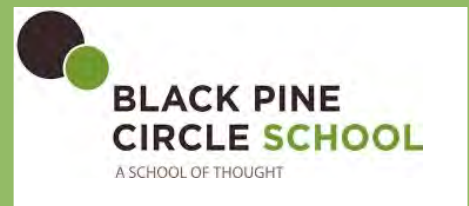
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) are a focus area at Black Pine Circle. The school has recently aligned its professional development for teachers in this direction. In addition, the school is working on preparing students to collaborate and thrive in a diverse world through its curricular connections. Graduates share that they understand systems of inequity and what it means to be an agent of change. Furthermore, the School has been focused on various ways to serve a population of families and educators who are representative of the richly diverse East Bay demography.

The School's efforts around DEI manifest in many ways, including (but not limited to):

- Aligning professional development days and work in the areas of DEI
- Promoting and prioritizing the People of Color Conference (by NAIS) as a fundamental PD need for faculty of color
- Recruiting efforts using NMNET to help attract diverse teaching faculty
- Ongoing work on the creation of intentional classroom practices that focus on DEI
- Creating and supporting affinity groups for both Lower and Upper School students
- Long-standing partnerships and outreach to neighborhood organizations.

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Finances, Fundraising and Governance

Finances: The school is well-managed financially, although there is agreement that the systems and structures for both finance and development can be further refined and strengthened. Black Pine Circle has procured adjacent properties over time—no small feat in the Bay Area—which have enabled the school’s healthy growth. To minimize debt, the most recent purchase utilized the reserves. Therefore, the school will need to replenish reserves while continuing to improve existing facilities and planning for the next significant campus build-out. While the campus is charming, the learning and administrative spaces range considerably. The decision to put key administrators in a house adjacent to campus has allowed more student space, but the “cost” of having the leadership team separated from teachers and students is significant. In a comprehensive facilities overhaul, there is the hope that there can be more connectedness between administrators and teachers, and that the School’s financial resources will meet these challenges.

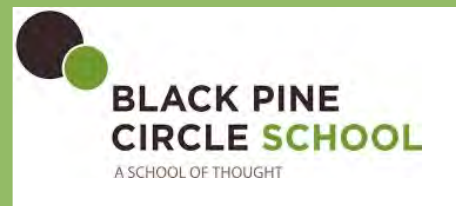
Fundraising: Black Pine Circle raises roughly one-half million dollars in the Annual Fund, and hosts a “Spring Soiree” that brings \$70,000 additional dollars to the school. The last capital campaign, completed in 2017, raised 1.5 million dollars for the building of the science building, or “Q Lab”; a previous campaign funded the creation of the “Founders Building,” comprising a beautiful library and classrooms. Linking communications, marketing, admissions, and fund-raising will help the school move to the “next level” in its ability to inspire and engage donors. Along with the exciting building projects on campus, it is broadly acknowledged that the time will soon come to create and build an endowment. The next capital campaign will most likely involve a larger board, trained and eager to lead the school forward, a

spirited and enthusiastic leader, and a clearly articulated vision for the future.

Governance: The Board of Trustees is in a strong position and has an emerging succession plan for key Trustees. It comprises fifteen intelligent, accomplished people with diverse backgrounds and skill sets, with membership including current parents, an alumnus, a faculty member, and a leader from the Parent Circle (BPC’s Parent group). This diverse group has provided the strategic leadership and partnership that have enabled Black Pine Circle to purchase three buildings and position the school well in a complex and demanding market. Trustees are clear about the boundaries that healthy Boards observe and do not overly engage with the school’s operations. They are aware of the critical importance of the campus improvements that will be central in the next several years of the school’s journey and the significant capital campaign that will likely accompany that work.



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Challenges and Opportunities

Black Pine Circle is a one-of-a-kind school holding tight to its founding values while working hard to evolve and grow in the competitive East Bay independent school market. Black Pine Circle has reached enrollment targets and has aggressively added to its campus facilities while striving to maintain competitive salaries and professional development resources for the faculty and staff. Furthermore, it has developed and sustained a distinctive program, providing academic challenge, deep exploration of the arts, and close attention to student wellness and social-emotional learning.

While a thoughtful interim plan is being implemented for the 2024-25 school year, this is a school poised for change, and with changes come challenges and opportunities. Below is a list of considerations that the next Head of School should anticipate.

- Black Pine Circle's faculty is highly regarded and deeply committed to its craft. As seasoned and celebrated faculty approach retirement and/or move on, the next Head of School must be skilled at recruiting and sustaining a talented, mission-aligned staff.
- Sustaining the vibrancy and vigor of the academic program will require continued attention to how Socratic discourse is taught and practiced throughout the school and how the curricular scope and sequence is continually assessed. As the School strives to serve a diverse range of learners, both support staffing and continued professional development for teachers will be critical to the success of Black Pine Circle's students.
- In partnership, the Board and Administrative team at Black Pine Circle have enabled the school to grow and better serve its students through several newly acquired spaces.



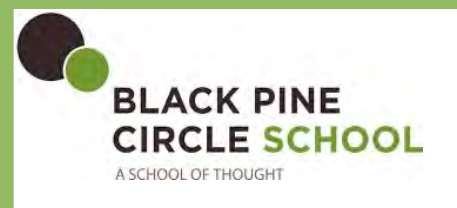
Furthermore, the school is negotiating with another nearby property owner in the hope of further enhancing the campus. Through an inclusive process to create a Campus Master Plan, the next Head will need to help solidify the vision for the newly purchased spaces, and reimagine, refine, and unify existing spaces.

- Students are well-served by two distinct divisions whose faculty, counselors, specialists, and administrators understand the importance of a healthy balance between academics, social, and emotional support. However, the Lower and Upper Divisions could be further aligned and integrated; the next Head will work with the Lower and Upper School leaders to build collaboration, improve systems, refine a thoughtful scope and sequence, and provide clarity and consistency across divisions. For example, as the school has grown, some of the most beloved K-8 traditions have not "scaled" well and may need to be updated or reinvented.

"Students are treated with respect and encouraged to take risks, make mistakes, and discover."

—BPC Faculty Member

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- While there has been consistent participation in fundraising efforts, the next Head of School will need to deepen the culture of philanthropy in preparation for a likely capital campaign that will help the school move into, utilize, and maintain its campus, and further develop its programs. Lastly, the next Head will work with the Board of Trustees to replenish the school's financial reserves as well as consider the establishment of an endowment.
- Black Pine Circle's key administrators are physically housed in a space within walking distance but away from the center of campus activities and action. The team is made up of veteran and newer members who have distinct working styles. The next Head must work to bring together the senior administrative team in a structured way so they can consistently and collaboratively accomplish their goals. Furthermore, the Head must support the team in finding ways to more genuinely connect and make transparent their partnership with the faculty.
- Communications —both internal and external —need to be further structured and thoughtfully segmented, measured and clear. A strategic marketing and communications plan will help the School inform prospective families of the school's programs, speak directly to the needs of Lower and Upper School parents, and help disseminate an inspiring vision of the journey ahead to the full community. Black Pine Circle alumni and their families will be tremendously helpful in communicating the power and impact of a BPC education. Strategic communications will lay the groundwork for the capital improvements the School would like to complete in the next few years and can internally align and unify the BPC community.

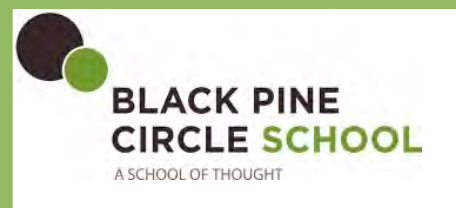


Leadership Experience and Attributes

The successful candidate for the position of Head of School at Black Pine Circle should be a mission and values-driven leader, embodying and demonstrating most, if not all, of the following leadership attributes and qualities:

- **Communication Skills:** Exceptional written and oral communication skills, complemented by excellent organizational and presentation abilities both within and outside of the School community.
- **Clear Vision and Strategy:** Strategic thinker with empathetic problem-solving abilities, adept at envisioning long-term educational goals while understanding and addressing current priorities.
- **Collaborative Leadership:** Demonstrate a proven track record of effective collaboration in educational leadership, emphasizing teamwork, comradery, and shared goals.
- **Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion:** Respect, value, and give space for student, staff, and parent voice, expression, and identity by,

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among other things, having a strategic knowledge of and experience with diversity, equity and inclusion in a school community.

- **Structures and Systems:** Demonstrate strong executive functioning skills and follow-through with an established track record of execution. Build teams, form effective structures and systems, seek feedback, and insist upon accountability. Communicate strategic priorities clearly and consistently. Address challenges in a timely and direct manner.
- **Community Builder:** Maintain a highly visible, kind, warm and accessible presence within the life of the School and share a sense of humor and delight with students.

"Black Pine Circle teaches students HOW to think, not WHAT to think."

—BPC Parent

"Teacher here really care. I mean REALLY CARE!"

—7th Grade Student

Salary Range and Benefits

Salary Range: \$250,000 - 350,000. Black Pine Circle offers a competitive benefits package including a retirement plan with an employer contribution, comprehensive insurance benefits, and support for professional growth.

The Application Process

Black Pine Circle School has retained Resource Group 175 (RG175) to support the search for its next Head of School. Interested candidates should prepare: a resume, cover letter, personal statement and references (will not be contacted without permission). The application deadline is **Friday, April 19, 2024** for a start date of July 1, 2025. Candidates are requested to submit these materials online at: <https://rg175.com/candidate/signup>

For an initial inquiry or to nominate a potential candidate for this exciting leadership position, please contact one of the following RG175 consultants:

Catherine Hunter
chunter33@gmail.com
510-504-8036

Steve Morris
smorris@rg175.com
415-370-2388

To learn more about Black Pine Circle School, visit the school's website at: <https://blackpinecircle.org>

NON-DISCRIMINATORY POLICY

"Black Pine Circle School is an Equal Opportunity Employer. We have an ongoing commitment to the creation of a workplace free of discrimination and harassment. We encourage applicants from all cultures, races, ethnicity, sex, religion, ancestry, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, age, physical or mental disability, pregnancy, military and veteran status, citizenship status, marital status, genetic information, height, weight, or any other status protected by federal, state or local law. We are committed to a fair and equitable workplace where everyone is a respected and valued member of the team."