

DR. ALEXANDRA SUNDMAN

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Dear Head of School Search Committee:

With great enthusiasm, I am applying for the position of Head of School at The Harley School. Committed to cultivating in students a sense of civic responsibility, environmental awareness, personal well-being, and community stewardship, The Harley School is uniquely compelling to me. My experience as an educational leader positions me to guide it to grow and thrive in pursuit of educating students to become lifelong, joyful learners and courageous, creative leaders of courage and confidence.

Like Harley, the schools where I have worked are known not only for pursuing academic excellence via inquiry-based, experiential pedagogies but also for fostering an indelible sense of personal responsibility, integrity, and social justice. Your vision – to nurture a “thriving world in which we all become our truest and best selves” – resonates deeply with mine. That Harley is regarded so dearly by its constituents, from students to alumni, is unsurprising given the community’s steadfast adherence to Harriet Bentley’s educational vision: to surround children with “conditions [that] free [their] potentialities for full growth and development.”

My current work as a Division Head at the Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart has crystallized my passion for school leadership and organizational psychology. As a member of our small senior administrative team, I have had the good fortune to gain a solid grasp on the interrelated intricacies of all aspects of school operations and culture. Working alongside the Directors of Enrollment Management, Institutional Advancement, Facilities, and Marketing and Communications, as well as the CFO and my peer Division Directors and School Head, has given me a foundational knowledge of the many forces, tensions, and levers at play in the successful leadership of an independent school. Additionally, I routinely partake in administrative discussions about master planning projects, branding initiatives, and strategic direction.

Two points of pride are 1) my reputation among Stone Ridge families as a student-centered, communicative, forward-thinking leader and 2) my record, borne out by 360-survey reports, of having fostered a divisional culture that is deeply collegial and inclusive.

Recent institutional accomplishments include

- Spearheading the redesign of our faculty evaluation system;
- Co-leading our AI task force;
- In partnership with Admissions colleagues, increasing the size of the Middle School by 15% and significantly bolstering retention as students move to the Upper School;
- Negotiating an institutional partnership with Trinity Washington University;
- Redesigning the daily academic schedule to optimize student learning, experience, and well-being; and
- Developing and implementing a distributed leadership model by training and equipping department chairs with coaching skills and leadership responsibilities.

In my former roles as English Department Chair and Coordinator of Professional Development (PD) at the National Cathedral School (NCS), I learned how to articulate and garner support for a vision, lead people, and lead change. In particular, my work as PD Coordinator showed me how equipping teachers with a sense of autonomy, mastery, and purpose is foundational to the flourishing of a healthy school culture. I am particularly proud of my collaborative efforts with the NCS Development Office to inaugurate a half-million-dollar donor gift supporting pedagogical innovation. Collaterally, my work as PD Coordinator broadened my understanding of how various offices and constituencies within an independent school work together to support the education of children.

Sharing Harley's belief that "diversity . . . forms the fabric of our society," I am deeply committed to building an inclusive, welcoming, and equitable community. My professional record in the spheres of diversity, equity, and inclusion positions me to continue to galvanize and facilitate critical and necessary conversations on this subject, even when navigating such discussions can be tricky. As parents and educators, we owe it to our children to actively affirm each community member's dignity and unique value.

To Harley's Head of School Office, I bring a mission-aligned, forward-looking approach. My background has conferred on me:

- Understanding of the complexity, beauty, and myriad opportunities embedded within the systems and histories of independent schools;
- A deep appreciation of the aspirations, societal obstacles, and developmental needs of today's youth;
- A passion for nurturing strong, vibrant, and inclusive communities of children and adults of all backgrounds and identities;
- A steadfast belief in the importance of forging strong and trusting home-school partnerships;
- Extensive experience with curriculum design, assessment philosophy, and emerging technologies;
- A reputation as a steadfast and collaborative team-builder, adept at garnering and executing shared vision;
- Demonstrated ability to cultivate a healthy culture and community dedicated to growth;
- Experience teaching Lower, Middle, and Upper School students;
- Polished oral and written communication skills;
- Steadfast belief that we must listen to our children; and
- A sense of humor and humility.

My broad-ranging experiences and skills position me to become a valuable, strategic leader dedicated to furthering Harley's work to build and sustain a joyful learning environment that sparks curiosity and critical thinking, nurtures the character and agency of its students, and celebrates their accomplishments. If we can do this, we will raise children who will thrive in tomorrow's multicultural community, and challenge and shape our world for the better.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and share more about my experiences, competencies, and passions. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart, Bethesda, MD

2021 – Present

Head of Middle School

- **Overview:** As a relationship-oriented leader of a division of 40 faculty & 240+ students (grades 5-8), I ensure the continuing excellence of all programming & operations in the context of the school's mission. As a member of the Senior Leadership Team, I collaborate closely with the Lower & Upper School Heads to deliver an innovative, cohesive, rigorous, mission-driven PK-12 academic program that centers student experience & well-being.
- **Select accomplishments**
 - **Institutional:** Spearheaded redesign of the [annual evaluation process](#) for all faculty/staff • Developed faculty growth-coaching framework, bolstering the school's distributed leadership model • Co-lead the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Task Force responsible for developing institutional core beliefs & guidelines as well as teacher training • Publish a monthly blog post • On a 2023 [ISM Faculty Climate Survey](#), earned divisional rating of "optimal performance" • Increased MS admissions applications by 35% over 3 years
 - **Divisional:** Redesigned academic schedule to reflect best practices for middle-grade learners • Implemented portfolio-based, student-led conferences • Developed interdisciplinary research & writing curriculum • Launched parent coffee & chat series • Designed restorative justice protocols for student discipline issues • Trained faculty in project-based & maker-space learning
- **Responsibilities**
 - **Institutional:** Serve as public spokesperson for division • Partner with Development colleagues on philanthropic initiatives • Actively participate in all stages of the Admissions process • Collaborate with the Communications team on story-telling initiatives & publications
 - **Curricular:** Serve as lead pedagogical & instructional coach to all divisional faculty • Using student testing data, oversee all aspects of curricular/co-curricular programming, ensuring alignment with the school mission & strategic plan • Ensure all course offerings are interdisciplinary, inquiry-based, experiential, & differentiated in instructional approach
 - **Personnel & Administrative:** Recruit, hire & orient teachers • Supervise & evaluate faculty • Manage divisional budgets • Responsible for all divisional communications • Liaise with colleagues regarding all student life activities & logistics

National Cathedral School, Washington, DC

2010 – 2021

Professional Development Coordinator

- Ensured equitable distribution of grants among faculty & staff • Managed a \$180,000+/year budget • Oversaw sabbatical selection process • Coordinated speaker series • Managed school's PD webpage • Worked with Development team to solicit gifts to support teacher development & growth

English Department Chair

- Oversaw 12-member department known nationally for its excellence in teaching writing • Redesigned Freshman English • Wrote departmental handbook • Trained faculty in Harkness pedagogy

LS, MS & US English Teacher

- Developed 6 electives (i.e., Asian-American Lit., Lit. of the Vietnam War, Banned Books) • Advised school's awarded-winning literary magazine • Actively partnered with learning specialists, DEI director, college guidance, & counseling staff to support student academic, social, & emotional needs • Served as Senior Class Sponsor

Convent of the Sacred Heart , NYC, <i>MS English Teacher</i>	2001 – 2003, 2008 – 2010
Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart , Bethesda, MD, <i>US English Teacher</i>	2004 – 2006
The Churchill School & Center , NYC, <i>LS Generalist / MS English Teacher</i>	1999 – 2001
Yale University , New Haven, CT, <i>Graduate Teaching Fellow, Yale College</i>	1994 – 1999

EDUCATION

Yale University , Ph.D., M.Phil., Musicology	1999
Boston University , B.A., History, <i>magna cum laude</i> • B.Mus., Music, <i>summa cum laude</i>	1991

PRESENTATIONS, SPEECHES, & WRITINGS

- [“Grounding AI Policy in Mission, Inquiry & Collaboration”](#) NAIS Conf. Presentation, St. Louis, Feb. ‘24
- [“On Adaptability,”](#) Blogpost, Jan. ‘24
- [“On Light,”](#) Blogpost for Advent, Nov. ‘23
- “Empowering Girls through Data Storytelling & Fluency,” Stone Ridge fac. presentation, ‘24
- [“On Curiosity,”](#) Blogpost, Oct. ‘23
- [“AI Tools for Teaching & Learning.”](#) Stone Ridge, 3-hour fac. training workshop, Aug. ‘23
- [Stone Ridge Faculty & Staff Professional Growth & Evaluation Handbook,](#) Sep. ‘23
- [“Girls & the Mental Health Crisis,”](#) Blogpost, Feb. ‘23
- [“On Female Leadership,”](#) Blogpost, Oct. ‘22
- [“My Why,”](#) Parent Letter, Aug. ‘22
- [“Magic of Middle School,”](#) Blogpost, Mar. ‘22
- [“Learning Fast & Slow,”](#) Blogpost, Feb. ‘22
- [“On Community,”](#) *SR Magazine*, Winter ‘22
- [Baccalaureate Homily,](#) NCS, May ‘20

SERVICE & AWARDS

- ICGS Baltimore Conference Planning Committee, Spring ‘24
- AIMS Accreditation Visiting Team, Maryvale School, March ‘24
- Washington School for Girls, Academic Advisory Board, ‘23-present
- University of Chicago Outstanding Educator Award, ‘20
- AIMS Accreditation Visiting Team, Summit School, Spring ‘16
- Six-time recipient of Woodcock Fellowship Award, National Cathedral School, ‘15-20

SELECT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Youth Mental Health First Aid & Red Cross CPR/First Aid Cert., ‘23 • NBOA: Budget Meets Mission • Chesapeake Bay Foundation: Environmental Leadership, ‘23 • NBOA: Having Difficult Conversations, ‘23 • Harvard Business School: Leading Learning, ‘23 • ISM: Transformative Academic Leadership, ‘22 • Network of Sacred Heart Schools: Roots that Give Us Wings, ‘22 • AISGW: Women’s Leadership Initiative, inaugural cohort, ‘21-’22 Gilder Lehrman Inst.: The Vietnam War, ‘20 • ISM: Chairing Your Department: The First Five Years, ‘19 • Exeter Humanities Inst., ‘18 • SEED [Seeking Educational Equity & Diversity], ‘18-’19 • POCC, ‘17 • Two-time Natl. Endowment for the Humanities Fellow, ‘17 & ‘21 • Stanley King Counseling Inst., ‘17 • Critical Friends Groups Coaches Training (SFRI), ‘16

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PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

I believe an exceptional independent school leader possesses seven essential skills, beliefs, and values. She:

1. Is boldly student-centered.

Motivated by both human caring and pride of craft, a transformational school leader has deep and personal knowledge of the students in her charge: their backgrounds, needs, gifts, and dreams. Through experience, she knows that sustaining her students' pursuit of excellence requires a holistic approach that is as mindful of their moral, physical, and social development as their intellectual progress. To become the best versions of themselves, children must have a sense of purpose, agency, and belonging. A committed school leader embraces that obligation to each student.

2. Cultivates an inclusive community and actively fosters relationships.

An effective leader knows that children thrive when they feel connected to others – and for that reason, she centers the building of community as a core value. She also understands that the school serves as a valuable resource and partner for parents, an anchoring network for alumni, a venue for the talent and perspective of board members, and a workplace that fosters excellence in teachers. This leader recognizes that centering her community's quest for ever-greater degrees of inclusion and opportunity is a key responsibility.

As a relationship builder, this leader extends her hand, exudes warmth, and is accessible. She is also adaptable, reflective, discreet, and firm. A presence in the hallways, parent meetings, school dances, the lunchroom, and carpool dismissal line, she has her ear to the ground and – at the same time – can discern signal from noise. She garners the trust of students, teachers, board members, alumni, and parents through her willingness to listen and her ability to make – and accept the consequences of – well-considered decisions. Committed to building bridges among constituencies, departments, disciplines, factions, and experts within and outside of the school, she can align disparate visions for the sake and well-being of her students.

3. Stewards the school's resources with discernment and in alignment with mission.

As guardian of the community, she assumes responsibility for overseeing the school's resources, assets, and investments – seeking the expertise of others when necessary – and understands that tactical allocation and generation of resources is a question of values, purpose, and school mission. She prioritizes optimizing the school's position within its competitive landscape. She embraces her role as a philanthropic leader and strategically studies innovative modes of financial sustainability, including ways to reduce dependence on tuition flow. Committed to accessibility and affordability for the purpose of ensuring both diversity and marketplace distinction, she also advocates for competitive faculty compensation. She understands her role in actively partnering with experts to oversee the upkeep of facilities and campus expansion plans, as well as ensuring the sustainability and security of the school's IT infrastructure and data-keeping protocols.

4. Communicates with strength and grace, and believes in clear, unequivocal feedback.

A successful school leader has a compelling story to tell about her school – and tells it with panache and passion. Grounded in mission, she can articulate the lines of progress from the earliest days of a school's

history and cast them forward, sketching the blueprint of an institution preparing children to inherit and better tomorrow's world.

Equally important, a confident school leader can institute support for a struggling teacher and convince a father that his child is unhealthily overscheduled. She is adept at quelling parent anxiety, can mediate conflict, and believes in the power of restorative processes. She is also quick to express gratitude and to credit the good work of her colleagues. With ease and aplomb, she can craft a gracious thank-you note, speak extemporaneously to an auditorium of several hundred, pen a convincing letter of recommendation, and deliver a commencement speech.

5. Champions her teachers and is, herself, respected as a strategic and experienced educational leader.

A master teacher herself, this leader knows that the heart and soul of any exceptional school live in the classrooms and among the daily interactions of students and teachers. As such, she appreciates that a vibrant, expert, and committed faculty is the backbone of any outstanding educational institution.

Invested in faculty development and growth, she holds that her school's approach to curricular design and pedagogy must constantly develop in accordance with the landscape of our changing world and root itself in data, research, and brain science. As an instructional leader, she prioritizes the cultivation of her students' skills and competencies – creative and critical thinking, collaboration, agency, and resilience – over the mere acquisition of knowledge. She believes that children of all ages learn best through inquiry, wonder, play, exploring, reflecting, and doing. By supporting teachers in their quest to create a world-class curriculum, the school positions itself to lead the charge into the future of teaching and learning.

A reflective leader upholds the bar of academic challenge yet understands that unduly straining children leads to a decrease in cognitive function and motivation. With deep concern about the current mental health crisis impacting children, she actively prioritizes the social and emotional well-being of her students through critical conversations, parent education, and the creation of strategic guardrails around academic expectations.

6. Commits to helping her team make authentic meaning of educating young people for tomorrow's world.

At present, few things are certain about the future of the earth and the human civilizations that will inhabit it. What we do know is that our world is more interconnected than ever before, and disruptions – to our ecology, social systems, economies, and dwindling resources – are precipitating at an ever-increasing rate. The core competencies cultivated in our students – thinking critically and creatively, communicating with clarity and conviction, reflecting on our values, and acting with courage and compassion – are increasingly requisite in the quest to grow future guardians and citizens of tomorrow's world. A visionary leader centers this mandate, and she expects her graduates to contribute to and shape our future for the better.

7. Holds in her heart equal measures of humility and humor.

A wise leader knows she does not have all the answers and models willingness to seek help and counsel. She owns her mistakes and learns from them.

And she believes that – within the walls of a school – laughter is key, as a school without joy cannot nurture children or prepare them to meet the challenges of our world and future.

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As an educational leader who aspires daily to center the student experience and to equip her students to become courageous and empathetic citizens and leaders, I embrace these essential skills, beliefs, and values.